GAMBIT

Understanding Chess Middlegames

John Nunn

Featuring the 100 most important middlegame ideas

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Symbols

x	capture
+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
0-0	castles kingside
0-0-0	castles queenside
Ch	championship
Corr.	correspondence game
(*n*)	*n*th match game
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(1-0, 63)	White went on to win on move 63 (etc.)

Introduction

This book has its origins in my earlier title *Understanding Chess Endgames*, which was published in 2009. The format of that book involved choosing 100 important topics and devoting two pages to each, and I wondered if it would be possible to treat the middlegame in the same way. The book you are holding is the result.

The middlegame is the most difficult part of chess to write about. With an opening book there are accepted formulae, such as the repertoire book, which provide a structure and limit the area you need to cover. The middlegame, by contrast, is a vast and poorly-charted ocean, and attempting to cover it in one book is a considerable challenge. It's inevitable that the two pages devoted to each topic cannot penetrate very deeply; indeed, whole books have been devoted to some of the individual topics. However, my intention is not to examine in detail all aspects of the middlegame, but to offer an overview of the subject. Different readers will probably use this book in differing ways. For some, it will provide an introduction to many middlegame concepts that they have not met before, while for more advanced players it can provide a quick revision course and serve to highlight any gaps in their knowledge.

I hope that all readers will find the examples instructive and entertaining. Finding suitable examples is a particular problem for authors tackling the middlegame. Middlegames are inherently messy, and it is very rare for a game to be dominated by one theme. More often several themes are intertwined and as the game progresses different ideas come to the fore. Some authors tackle this problem by simply ignoring all aspects of the example apart from the one they are focusing on, but this can be misleading. Readers tend to develop a simplistic view of middlegames, and start to think that all they need to do is have a plan such as 'dominate the dark squares' and the game will play itself. Real games very rarely have such a simple course since your opponent will try to interfere with your plan and you will have to adapt your strategy to the evolving circumstances on the board. In this book I have adopted a different method, based on focusing on key moments and decisions, and trying so far as possible to describe the most important concepts in words. There is little detailed analysis in the book, but that doesn't mean that the examples were not carefully analysed. All too often in chess literature, one finds a general description of a game which, when checked by detailed analysis, turns out to be a complete misrepresentation of what happened. With this book, I first analysed the examples in depth with computer assistance (Deep Fritz, Deep Rybka and the free engine Houdini, depending on the type of position) and used this analysis as a basis for my general description of the course of the game, omitting all but the most important variations. The result is that some examples may appear less clear-cut than is usual in textbooks, but I have preferred to offer an accurate portrayal of a game rather than paint over inconvenient details.

The examples have as far as possible been chosen from recent games, so there are many positions involving the stars of today such as Anand, Carlsen, Kramnik and Kariakin. At the very least, I hope readers will enjoy these 200 examples of middlegame play, but I would like to address a few words on the structure of the book to those who wish to do a little more than dip into the book at random. The book starts with two short essays, the first being 'Myths of the Middlegame', which warns that some concepts that are repeatedly found in textbooks are at best partially true. The myth of the queenside majority is taken as a case in point. The second essay, 'Interconnectedness', shows how middlegame positions should be considered in a holistic manner, since events on one part of the board can dramatically influence the situation in another part of the board, and strategic decisions can have long-term repercussions that influence every facet of the game. It's wrong to divide

positions into chunks which are then considered independently, and if you think like this you are going to miss a lot of important ideas.

After this, the book moves on to the 100 middlegame topics. These are spread across the eight parts of the book (see the Contents list for details), and each part starts with a two-page introduction which links the positions in that part together. These introductions are important and should be read carefully before going on to the individual sections in that part of the book. The examples have been chosen mainly for their instructive qualities, with a particular focus on the key point that I wish to make. It's certainly worth going through the whole of the game, since a careful reader will pick up other useful tips. As an example, Anand-Svidler, Moscow 2009 appears in Section 15 on 'Central Pawns', but it could equally well have been placed in Section 76 on 'Queenside and Kingside Majorities' or even in the essay on 'Myths of the Middlegame'. I've chosen to emphasize the point that an extra central pawn can form the basis for a kingside attack, but I could also have mentioned the powerlessness of Black's queenside majority or the fact that his superficially attractive central outpost on d4 didn't help him to defend against White's threats. When playing over the examples, bear in mind the other middlegame themes that are mentioned in this book, because several may crop up in one example.

I hope that readers will find this book informative and entertaining, and that they will in future have a broader view of the middlegame and better appreciate the many subtleties which arise in this phase of the game.

John Nunn
September 2011

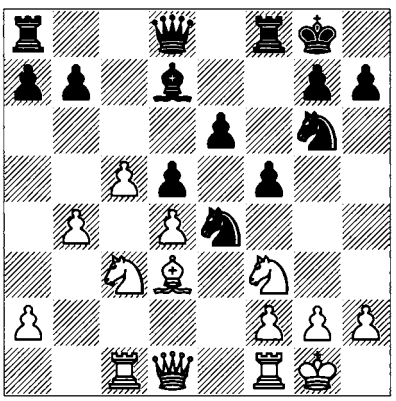
Myths of the Middlegame

There are many myths about middlegame play. Influenced by some notable writers, generations of players have come to believe principles that are at best partly true and at worst largely false. These myths could be the subject of a whole book, but here I would just like to focus on one example: the myth of the queenside majority. Let's take a typical position from a noted textbook of the mid-20th century: Max Euwe's *Judgement and Planning in Chess* (originally published by Bell in 1953; algebraic edition by Batsford, 1998). Euwe devotes a whole chapter to the queenside majority and this is his first example.

Botvinnik – Kmoch
Leningrad 1934

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 c5 ♗e7 8 ♗b5 0-0 9 ♘f3 ♘e4 10 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 11 ♖c1 ♘g6 12 0-0 ♗d7 13 ♗d3 f5 14 b4

B



Here's a selection of Euwe's comments on this position:

"The material is equal ... it cannot be said that White has progressed further than Black; on the contrary, Black's knight, well established in White's half of the board, looks particularly threatening."

"Why is White's position better; why can his advantage be called a winning one?"

"White stands better because he has a pawn-majority on the queenside ... the front pawn on White's majority wing has passed the black d-pawn, and thus the pawn-chains on opposite wings are independent of each other."

Now Euwe was a world champion, and much of his writings make good sense; indeed, in the above description he hit upon a key point about this position, but it is obscured by his belief that a queenside majority is always an advantage. Many writers from Tarrasch to Euwe have seen chess as something that can be formalized and that obeys definite, almost mathematical, rules. But chess isn't really like this since any general principle will always have a large number of exceptions. Unfortunately, the above authors, who both had a great deal worthwhile to say about chess, sometimes strayed too far in their attempts to formalize chess, and this has had an influence on lesser writers, who have often promulgated principles which make little or no sense. In this book, I often make an effort to show that practically all features of the middlegame have a good and a bad side and that to distinguish between these requires an examination of the actual position. By all means have a knowledge of chess 'principles', but these should only be regarded as guidelines, a starting point for a consideration of the concrete situation in front of you. The best modern authors, such as Dvoretsky and Watson, have offered a more balanced view of middlegame situations and have emphasized the virtues of flexibility and open-mindedness.

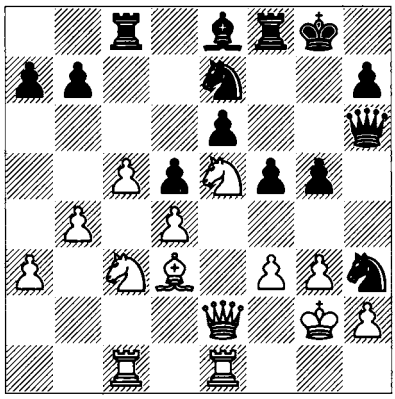
Let's take a look at the above position from a modern perspective and see if we can uncover the underlying logic. Euwe was being somewhat

unfair in choosing this as an example of the merits of the queenside majority, because White has a whole raft of positional advantages, most of which have absolutely nothing to do with the queenside majority. First of all, the backward e6-pawn and the resulting hole on e5 spring to the eye. True, at the moment the e6-pawn is shielded by the knight on e4, but this knight will probably not stay there forever since White will eventually be able to play f3 to force the knight into a retreat or an exchange. Then the e6-pawn will be fully exposed to attack along the half-open e-file. Secondly, Black has a bad bishop on d7 (see Section 30), which is severely restricted by the light-squared central pawn-chain. This bishop has very few prospects of activity. In the long run, it could emerge via e8 to h5, but this would involve moving the knight away from g6, which would allow ♘e5 followed by f3. Black's chances of playing ...e5 are virtually zero as this would require control of e5 and reinforcement of d5, and even if Black succeeded, he would be left with an isolated d-pawn.

It is true that the queenside majority is a further asset, because it gives White another possibility for active play. In addition to the plan of organizing f3, White also has the idea of simply advancing his pawn to b5, after which Black has to worry about c6 at some point. But the key point is that this advantage is peripheral to the overall assessment of the position. I don't criticize Euwe for his choice of this example, but I think it is misleading to focus on one rather minor aspect of the position and pretend that this is the sole reason why White has an advantage. Let's look at what happened in the game:

14...♗e8 15 g3 ♖c8 16 ♖e1 ♕f6 17 a3 ♘e7 18 ♘e5 ♕h6 19 f3 ♘f2 20 ♕e2 ♘h3+ 21 ♔g2 g5

It's interesting to note that White's queenside pawns are basically still where they were in the previous diagram and that the queenside majority hasn't played any part in the game so far, except as a kind of lurking threat. On the other hand, Black's other positional defects have played a major role in the action. His e4-knight was displaced by f3, and now stands offside and immobile on h3, and White's knight occupies



the hole in front of the backward e6-pawn, which is under heavy pressure along the half-open e-file.

22 ♘b5

Black's weakness on the dark squares becomes a significant factor. The knight cannot be allowed to reach d6, so Black has to exchange it, but then the bishop can come to d7 to exert further pressure on the e6-pawn.

22...♗xb5 23 ♗xb5 ♖f6 24 ♗d7 ♖d8

Now at last the queenside majority comes into its own. Black's forces are totally lacking in coordination and can do nothing to stop a queenside advance.

25 b5 ♕h5 26 c6 ♖h6 27 ♔h1 1-0

Euwe stated that White's advantage in the first diagram is a winning one, but this is really a huge exaggeration. Yes, White is better, and it's interesting to go back to this point and construct a reasonable plan of defence for Black. The game continuation shows that simply waiting isn't going to help Black since there are many ways White can improve his position. When defending an inferior position, it's essential to look at what assets your position has and make the most of them (see Section 22). Black's main asset in the first diagram is his active knight on e4, but as we have seen this is purely temporary since White can eventually expel it by f3. Therefore we may conclude that Black has to take action quickly, before White has a chance to improve his position further. The only possible active plan is to play ...b6, an idea which went unmentioned by Euwe. This is a

good example of how one must be flexible and not place too much weight on general principles. One such principle states that you should not weaken yourself on the side where you are being attacked, and indeed playing ...b6 and then ...bxc5 would seem to give White exactly what he wants: a passed pawn on the queenside. But such considerations only take into account the static factors in the position and ignore ingredients such as piece activity and time, which can be just as important, if not more so, than pawn-structure.

If Black plays ...b6 and ...bxc5, then White will have a choice between bxc5 and dxc5, but both of these have defects. If White plays dxc5, then Black will have a 2-0 central majority and the removal of the d4-pawn greatly improves Black's chances of setting his central pawns in motion by playing ...e5. Moreover, Black would be able to play ...♕f6, attacking c3, activating his queen and preparing to play his rooks behind his potentially dangerous central pawns. Of course, the resulting battle between White's queenside pawns and Black's central ones might still end in White's favour, but Black would have considerable activity and by playing this way White would have to accept the risk of a possible defeat. The alternative is bxc5, but then Black's queen might find an active square on a5. Moreover, by playing ...♖c8 and putting pressure on c5, Black might be able to play ...e5, knocking out the defender of c5 and exchanging the backward e6-pawn for the passed c5-pawn. Taking with the b-pawn is the safe way for White to play, but it is also not very ambitious. One plausible line is 14...b6 15 ♘e2 ♖c8 16 g3 a5 17 a3 axb4 18 axb4 bxc5 19 bxc5 ♕c7 followed by ...♖a8 or ...♖b8. Although this allows White to maintain a safe but modest advantage, Black has reasonable defensive chances since there's no immediate prospect of White being able to drive the knight away from e4.

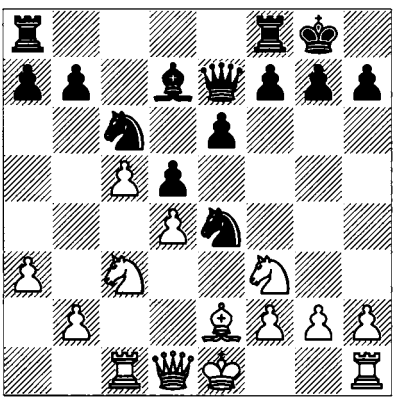
This analysis of the position indicates to what extent dynamic considerations play a part in middlegame play. It's tempting to focus on static factors, partly because these don't require any careful analysis, but activity is an important and often undervalued part of any middlegame assessment.

Now let's take a look at Euwe's second example.

Botvinnik – Konstantinopolsky
Sverdlovsk 1943

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 ♗g5 0-0 8 ♖c1 ♘c6 9 c5 ♘e4 10 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 11 ♗e2 ♗d7 12 a3

B



This position is similar to that in the previous example, except that Black's pawn is on f7 rather than f5, a difference that clearly operates in Black's favour. Konstantinopolsky evidently didn't appreciate the significance of this point.

12...f5?

Euwe quite rightly criticized this move, which introduces all the negative features of the previous position. However, his suggestion of 12...f6 13 b4 ♘xc3 14 ♖xc3 a6 15 0-0 ♖ad8 "with the idea of eventually pushing ...e5", which is directly copied from Botvinnik's notes, is certainly no better, since after 16 ♕d2 ♗e8 17 ♘h4! Black is in a very awkward position. If he plays 17...e5, then after 18 ♘f5 ♕c7 19 dxe5 fxe5 20 ♘d6 White's knight is very strong and Black will probably have to surrender the exchange, while after 17...g5 18 ♖g3 ♔h8 19 ♘f3 followed by h4 White also has active play on the kingside.

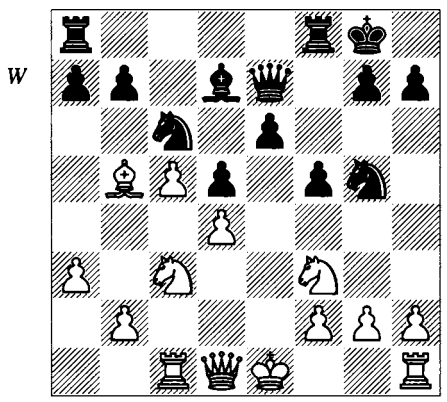
Anyone who has read the analysis of the preceding example will doubtless be able to guess the correct plan for Black. He has to take advantage of his lead in development (note that White has not yet castled) to activate his pieces by

playing 12...b6!. After 13 b4 bxc5 14 bxc5?! ♖ab8 15 0-0 ♖b2 16 ♗d3 f5 (now this is reasonable because Black's piece activity is more important than the backwardness of the e-pawn) 17 ♘a4 the players agreed to a draw in Čabrilo-Z.Popović, Dubrovnik 2008, although White was much the higher rated player. Black was actually doing White a favour by accepting, as he certainly stands better now. His pieces are very active, the knight on e4 is strong and the d4-pawn is under pressure. White should instead play 14 dxc5, although all one can say for sure is that the resulting position is double-edged.

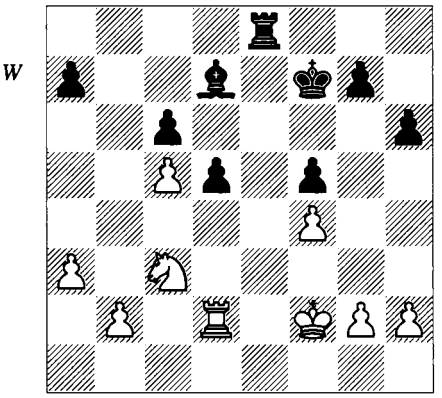
The fact that neither Botvinnik nor Euwe mentioned 12...b6 is an indication of the way chess thinking has evolved since the 1950s. Today's players focus much more on activity and are fully aware that static advantages are difficult to exploit if your opponent has active pieces which continually disturb the quiet manoeuvres required to exploit purely positional advantages. It's also notable how players of the early to mid-20th century often defended quite poorly, playing passively and doing little to interfere with their opponent's plans. A consequence of this is that players who did understand the value of activity, such as Lasker, were very successful, even though their successes were often attributed to 'luck' or some other extraneous factor – a sure indication that other players simply didn't understand the logic behind their play.

The continuation of the game demonstrated Botvinnik's skill in technical positions.

13 ♗b5 ♘g5



14 ♗xc6 ♘xf3+ 15 ♕xf3 bxc6 16 ♕f4 ♖ae8 17 0-0 e5 18 ♕xe5 ♕xe5 19 dxe5 ♖xe5 20 f4 ♖e7 21 ♖fe1 ♖fe8 22 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 23 ♔f2 ♔f7 24 ♖d1 ♖e8 25 ♖d2 h6



By now it's clear that things have not gone very well for Black. Although the structure of the position has changed, he retains a serious positional disadvantage thanks to his bad bishop, which is locked in by three pawns fixed on light squares. White won by playing his king to d4 and making use of his queenside majority to create a passed pawn.

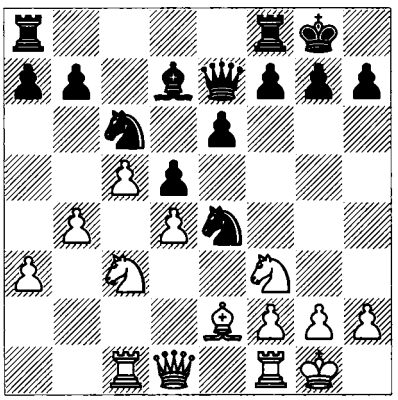
26 ♖e2 ♖b8 27 ♔e3 ♖b3 28 ♔d4 ♔f6 29 ♘a2 ♖b8 30 b4 g5 31 g3 gxf4 32 gxf4 a6 33 ♘c3 ♖g8 34 a4 ♖g4 35 ♖f2 ♗e6 36 b5 axb5 37 axb5 cxb5 38 ♘xb5 ♖g1 39 ♘c3 ♔f7 40 ♖b2 ♖f1 41 ♘e2 ♖e1 42 ♔e5 d4 43 ♔xd4 ♔g6 44 ♘c3 ♔h5 45 ♖e2 ♖xe2 46 ♘xe2 ♔g4 47 ♔e5 ♗c8 48 ♘d4 h5 49 ♘xf5 ♗d7 50 ♘g7 ♗a4 51 f5 ♔g5 52 ♘e6+ 1-0

I won't leave these examples yet because there's one important point which has not yet been explained. As we saw, the diagram on page 11 is satisfactory for Black because he can use his lead in development to keep White off-balance. However, imagine that White has a couple of extra tempi to play, say, 0-0 and b4. Then White would be clearly better, but exactly what is the reason for this? A player who focuses mainly on pawn-structure would probably echo Euwe's interpretation, that White's advantage is based mainly on his queenside pawn-majority, while a player who places more

value on piece activity would point to White's superior bishop. Both these factors are significant, but here I shall address mainly the question of the queenside majority. Is there something in Euwe's explanation after all, that such a majority confers an automatic advantage, or is there something else to it?

Here's the type of position we are discussing.

B



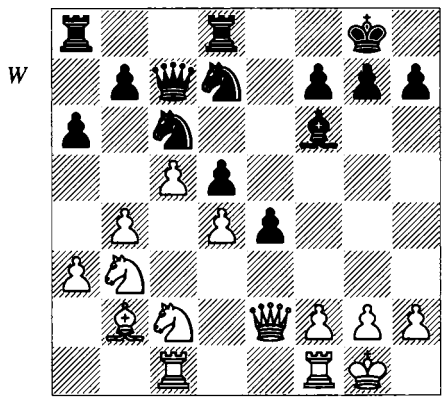
In order to find the basis for White's advantage, we have to look more carefully at the two pawn-majorities, White's 3 to 2 majority on the queenside and Black's 5 to 4 majority on the d- to h-files. One of the main benefits of a pawn-majority is its ability to create a passed pawn. However, this is one situation in which the threat is very often stronger than its execution. Pushing a majority and creating a passed pawn too quickly often backfires since the passed pawn needs defending and may be weak, becoming a liability rather than an asset. Imagine, for example, that White advances his queenside pawns so that he has pawns on a4, b5, c5 and d4, while Black has pawns on a7, b7 and d5. White's pawn-majority is very solid since the more advanced pawns on b5 and c5 are defended by their neighbours. Moreover, the pawns deny Black's pieces many useful squares; for example, he cannot settle his bishop on c6. Thus such a structure is generally more favourable to White than the same one without the b-pawns, even though in this case White already has his passed pawn. Here the c6-square is available to Black's pieces and he has the open b-file for potential counterplay. Similarly, playing c6 too soon will often be wrong as this gives Black's pieces access to squares which were formerly defended, such as d6; moreover, the c6-pawn no longer has pawn support and must be defended by pieces.

Pawn-majorities are useful for three reasons: they confer a space advantage on that part of the board, they deny important squares to the enemy pieces and they have the potential to create a passed pawn. The passed-pawn aspect is only one of the benefits of an advanced pawn-majority, and one that becomes increasingly important as the endgame approaches. The exploitation of a majority in the middlegame very rarely depends on the rapid creation of a passed pawn and when it does, as in the final stages of Botvinnik-Kmoch, it is possible only because the defender's position has already been seriously weakened.

Referring again to the preceding diagram, Black's pawns are clearly much less capable of creating a useful passed pawn than White's. Simply playing ...e5 will result in an isolated d-pawn, which although passed can be easily blockaded on d4. Therefore Black must first play ...f6 and only then ...e5, but this may be hard to accomplish because Black needs not only to have control of e5, but also a secure defence for the d5-pawn. Indeed, if White manages to play f4 then it may not be possible to play ...e5 at all. Even if Black does manage to play ...f6 and ...e5, there is the question of what to do next. If White conveniently played dxe5, then after ...fxe5 Black would have a passed d-pawn supported by an e-pawn, which would indeed be an asset. However, White will simply keep his pawn on d4. In some positions Black might be able to muster enough pressure on d4 to force White to play dxe5, but that certainly won't happen here since Black lacks a dark-squared bishop and by this time White will have played b5, driving the knight away from c6. So Black is left with the choice of ...exd4, which again results in an isolated d-pawn, or ...e4, when he now has a 4 vs 3 majority on the kingside. The latter option looks best, but now we can see why the basic structure is favourable for White. Even if Black manages to achieve all

this, it is only after arduous preparation and the expenditure of several tempi that he has managed to get his pawn from e6 to e4, and only now is his pawn-majority in a situation analogous to that of White's queenside majority.

We can see then that Euwe was correct in pointing out the significance of White's c-pawn having already passed by Black's d-pawn, but he failed to emphasize that the difference is mainly one of **time**: Black can reach the same type of situation, but only after lengthy preparation.



Vogt – Wl. Schmidt
Polanica Zdroj 1980

This position represents a much fairer test of the respective merits of kingside and queenside majorities, since Black's e-pawn has passed by the white d-pawn and so is in an analogous situation to White's c-pawn. Euwe asserted that even in a case like this, White should have the advantage, because "Forcing a passed pawn on the kingside often necessitates the advance of pawns whose proper function is to guard the king." I simply don't believe this. If, for example, it were easy for Black to advance his f-pawn (not the case here as his bishop is in the way), then ...f5-f4-f3, coupled with ...♘f8-g6, would give Black a dangerous attack on the white king without significantly exposing his own king at all. This is why the merits of queenside and kingside majorities are different in the middlegame and the endgame. In a very simplified position there are few chances for an attack on the king, whereas a distant passed pawn is a formidable weapon. However, in the middlegame the advance of a kingside pawn-majority often leads to a direct attack on the enemy king, and since mate decides the game, the possible creation of a passed pawn on the queenside ceases to be relevant.

In Vogt-Schmidt, it's pretty much a straight fight between the rival majorities; White's is the easier to advance, but on the other hand Black's bishop is potentially better, even though at the moment it is awkwardly placed blocking the f-pawn.

20 a4 ♘f8

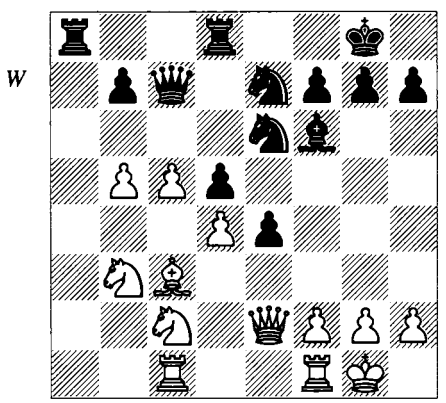
Black rightly starts swinging his knight towards the enemy kingside, since he may need to create threats against the poorly-defended white king.

21 b5 ♘e7

This move is satisfactory, but even the simple 21...axb5 22 axb5 ♘a5 23 ♘xa5 ♖xa5 24 ♖a1 ♖xa1 25 ♖xa1 ♘e6 gives Black an edge since his knight is coming to f4 and possibly d3.

22 ♗c3 axb5 23 axb5 ♘e6?

Overlooking a combination by which White wins material. Simply 23...♕d7 followed by ...♘e6-f4 gives Black a clear advantage: the threats against the white king are mounting, while it's not clear where White's queenside play is going.



24 ♗a5! ♖xa5 25 b6 ♕d7 26 ♘xa5 ♗xd4 27 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 28 ♕d2 ♘ec6 29 ♘xc6 ♘xc6

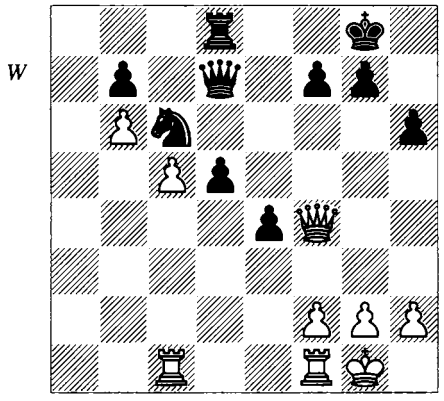
White has won the exchange for a pawn, but on the other hand his queenside majority has become blockaded while Black has secured a majority of pawns in the centre. White should be slightly better, but the position requires accurate handling.

30 ♕f4?!

White should play 30 f3, which serves both to break up Black's pawns and to open files for the white rooks.

30...h6?!

30...♕e7 is better, in order to meet 31 f3? with 31...e3.



31 h3?!

Missing the last chance to open the f-file by playing f3.

31...♕e7!

Black hits on the correct idea and now is at least equal.

32 ♖fe1 ♖e8 33 ♕d6

The exchange of queens doesn't help White much. The knight on c6 is very well posted, both holding up White's queenside pawns and lending support to Black's potentially powerful central pawns.

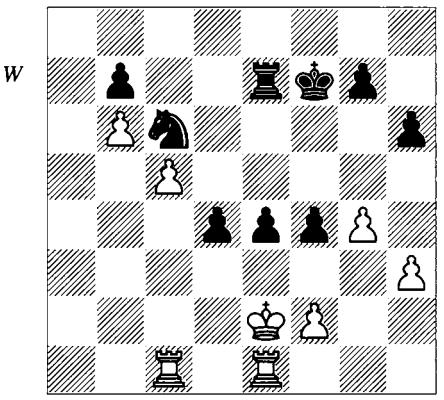
33...d4 34 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 35 ♔f1 f5 36 ♔e2?!

Moving the king out in front of the enemy pawns provides no relief. Instead White should play 36 ♖a1, followed by ♖a8+, trying to activate his rook.

36...♔f7 37 g4?

This looks like time-trouble since White simply provokes the pawns into advancing.

37...f4



Black's pawn-majority marches on and he can now create two connected passed pawns.

38 ♔d2 ♔f6 39 f3? e3+ 40 ♔d3 ♔e5 41 ♔c4 ♖d7 42 ♔d3 ♔d5 43 ♔e2 ♘e5 0-1

Despite my earlier warning about general principles, I am now going to formulate one: **a queenside majority which is unsupported by any other asset confers no advantage in the middlegame**. The examples above deal with only one particular type of pawn-structure, but Section 76 (page 184) gives two more examples with rather different pawn-structures.

The lessons here are to beware of general textbook principles, which may be at best partially valid, and to realize that in a given position static considerations, such as pawn-structure, are only part of the equation and it's almost always necessary to take into account dynamic factors such as piece activity and attacking chances.

It would be possible to go into each of the 100 topics in this book in equal detail, but then the book would be several times its current size. Instead, I shall leave it to the reader to view each topic with a critical eye, and to be aware that chess is not mathematics and is not constrained by rigid laws.

Interconnectedness

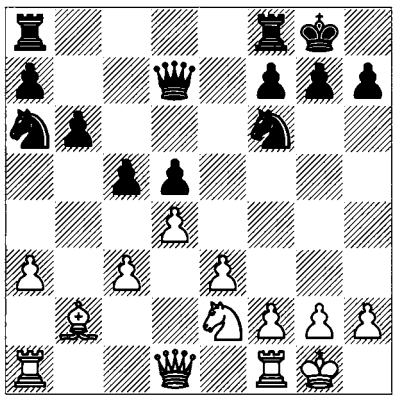
"I believe, as you know ... in the fundamental interconnectedness of all things."
DOUGLAS ADAMS, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*

Had Douglas Adams's fictional detective been a chess-player, he would doubtless have been very strong in the middlegame. With his belief that all things share hidden, underlying connections, he would have been able to grasp one of the main points of middlegame play, that all parts of the board are connected and that plans, strategies and tactics that occur in one area of the board can impact another part of the board in unexpected ways.

In the opening, the two players aim to develop their pieces and control the centre, so most of the play is focused on the middle of the board. In the endgame the action may take place on one flank, and where there is play on both flanks, it is often related only in terms of time, as for example in the common situation in which both sides are racing to promote a passed pawn. Thus the middlegame is unique in that play often spreads across the whole board. The connections between the different parts of the board are most obvious in tactical situations. For example, when conducting a sacrificial kingside attack, it's not unusual for a rook on the a-file to switch to the other side of the board (see Zemerov-Krivko on page 129 and Tiviakov-Le Quang on page 223). However, it's perhaps even more interesting when strategic decisions have implications that stretch across the whole board. Here's a famous example.

Botvinnik – Capablanca
AVRO, Rotterdam 1938

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 d5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 exd5 8 ♗d3 0-0 9 ♘e2 b6 10 0-0 ♗a6 11 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 12 ♗b2?! ♕d7



This is one of the most famous games ever played, and it's not my intention to repeat the many previous analyses of it, but to draw attention to one particular aspect of the game.

White doesn't stand especially well here. He has a majority of pawns in the centre, which he might eventually be able to put to use by f3, ♘g3 and e4, for example, but his queenside is weak and the bishop on b2 is badly placed.

13 a4!?

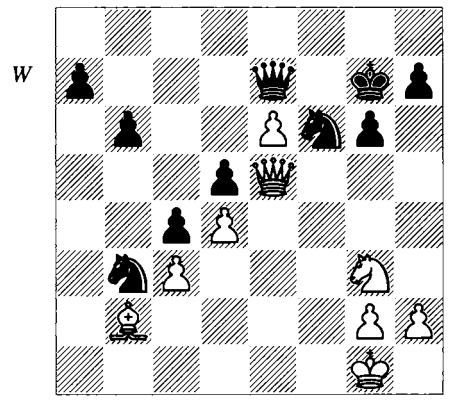
This move has far-reaching consequences. One alternative is 13 ♕d3, but after 13...♕a4 the a3-pawn is blocked, which means that White no longer has the option of activating his bishop via a3. By playing a4, White is willing to sacrifice the a-pawn, but if Black plays to win it, White both gains time and always has the possibility of ♗a3 at a later stage. It's usually better to be a pawn down with active play than to have a passive and lifeless position with equal material.

13...♖fe8 14 ♕d3 c4 15 ♕c2 ♘b8

Black takes the bait and plays to win the a-pawn by manoeuvring his knight to b3. Black's last three moves have all been criticized in

various annotations, yet the odd thing is that *Deep Fritz 12* likes all of them. I suppose these days this would be taken as evidence that Black was cheating.

16 ♖ae1 ♘c6 17 ♘g3 ♘a5 18 f3 ♘b3 19 e4 ♕xa4 20 e5 ♘d7 21 ♕f2 g6 22 f4 f5 23 exf6 ♘xf6 24 f5 ♖xe1 25 ♖xe1 ♖e8 26 ♖e6 ♖xe6 27 fxe6 ♔g7 28 ♕f4 ♕e8 29 ♕e5 ♕e7



Here Botvinnik struck with one of the most famous combinations of all time.

30 ♗a3!! ♕xa3 31 ♘h5+!

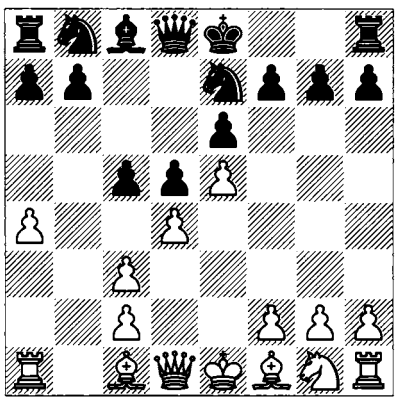
As if to emphasize the interconnectedness of the various parts of the board, these two deadly blows took place on opposite rook's files.

31...gxh5 32 ♕g5+ ♔f8 33 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 34 e7 ♕c1+ 35 ♔f2 ♕c2+ 36 ♔g3 ♕d3+ 37 ♔h4 ♕e4+ 38 ♔xh5 ♕e2+ 39 ♔h4 ♕e4+ 40 g4 ♕e1+ 41 ♔h5 1-0

The point I wish to emphasize is that the combination with 30 ♗a3!! wasn't just a fortuitous accident of which Botvinnik was able to take advantage. While he could not have foreseen the specific use to which it was put, Botvinnik was surely aware when he played a4 that the availability of the a3-square was a potential asset. Due to the pawns on c3 and d4, his bishop had little chance of coming to life on the long diagonal, and he was prepared to sacrifice a pawn to increase his bishop's long-term potential. A bishop actively posted on the a3-f8 diagonal would greatly increase the strength of a central pawn advance and it is easy to see how such an advance could lead to a kingside attack, as actually occurred in the game. This is a good example of how all the parts of the board are wired up in the middlegame. By making a modest pawn advance on the queenside, Botvinnik was able to increase the strength of his central play and this led more or less directly to an attack on the enemy king.

Kavalek – Uhlmann
Manila Interzonal 1976

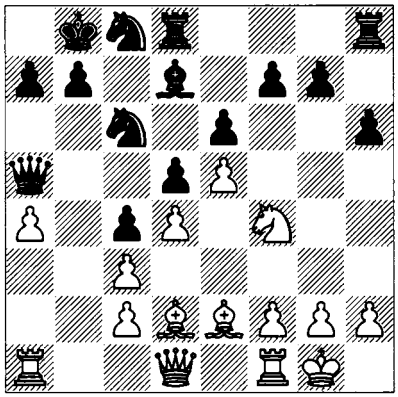
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 ♘e7 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 a4



Although the position is quite different from that in Botvinnik-Capablanca, the ideas have a certain similarity. If White omits a4, then Black can occupy the a4-square himself, either by ...♕a5-a4 or by ...♗d7-a4. This has the effect of reducing the long-term activity of White's dark-squared bishop and gives Black extra squares which he can use to exploit White's weak queenside pawns. This is a question of opening theory, and those who play the French with either colour are well aware of the significance of the a4 advance. In an echo of Botvinnik-Capablanca, playing a4 indicates a willingness to sacrifice this pawn at a later stage.

7...♘bc6 8 ♘f3 ♕a5 9 ♗d2 ♗d7 10 ♗e2 c4 11 ♘g5 h6 12 ♘h3 0-0-0 13 ♘f4 ♔b8 14 0-0 ♘c8

Black is playing to win the a4-pawn with ...♘b6. Here White's compensation for the a-pawn is perhaps less obvious than in Botvinnik-Capablanca, since his bishop is currently

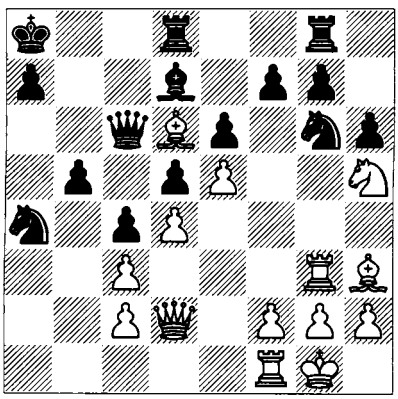


on d2 and cannot immediately exploit the potential of the a3-f8 diagonal. Moreover, there is no mobile pawn-majority. However, Black's plan to capture the a-pawn is quite slow and White is able to use the time to attack Black's vulnerable kingside.

15 ♘h5 ♖hg8 16 ♗g4 ♘b6 17 ♖e1 ♘xa4 18 ♖e3 b5 19 ♖f3 ♗e8 20 ♖g3 ♘e7

For the moment Black has countered White's kingside threats, but with the c3-pawn defended by the rook, White is free to play his bishop round to a3.

21 ♗c1 ♘g6 22 ♗a3 ♔a8 23 ♕d2 ♕c7 24 ♗h3 ♗d7 25 ♗d6 ♕c6 26 ♖f1!



White is now ready for f4-f5, breaking open Black's position. Black is handicapped not only by his weak dark squares, but also by the knight on a4 (which corresponds to the b3-knight in Botvinnik-Capablanca), which is out of play and cannot participate in the defence.

26...♗c8 27 f4 f5 28 exf6 gxf6 29 f5! exf5 30 ♗b4 ♕b6 31 ♗xf5 a5 32 ♗xa5? ♕xa5 33 ♗xg6 f5? 34 ♘f4 ♖g7

White has regained the sacrificed pawn and now has a decisive advantage. Black's position is riddled with pawn-weaknesses, he has a bad bishop and his king is exposed.

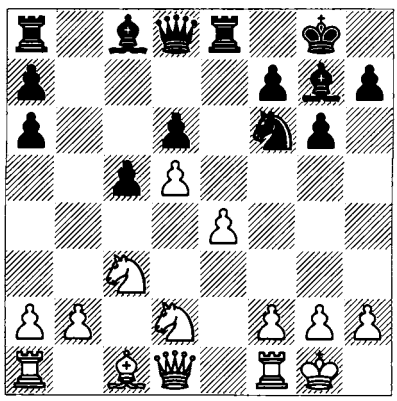
35 ♖e3 ♕b6 36 ♗e8 ♖d6 37 ♖b1 ♗d7 38 ♕e1 ♔a7 39 ♖b4 ♕d8 40 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 41 ♖b1 ♔b6 42 ♕e2 ♔c6 43 ♖e1 ♕a7 44 ♖e6 ♕d7 45 ♕f3 ♘b6 46 ♖xd6+ ♔xd6 47 ♕h5 1-0

In this example, we again saw how the early a4 and the later transfer of the bishop to the a3-square proved crucial elements in the success of White's attack against Black's kingside, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the play on the two flanks.

Here's another example featuring some different ideas.

Kholmov – Sardarov
USSR Junior Team Ch, Riga 1954

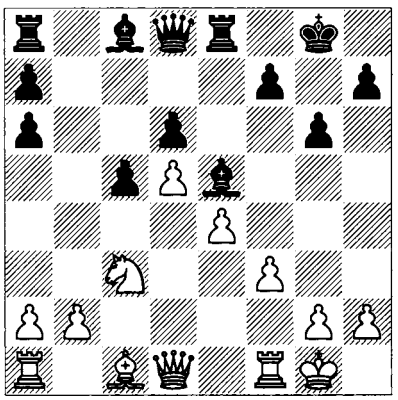
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 e4 ♗g7 8 ♗e2 0-0 9 0-0 ♖e8 10 ♘d2 ♘a6 11 ♗xa6? bxa6



Nowadays everybody who enters the Modern Benoni with either colour knows that it's wrong to exchange on a6 in positions like this, but it's not so easy to explain why. Indeed, at first sight the exchange looks like rather a good idea. White leaves Black with doubled isolated

pawns on a rook's file (generally speaking, the worst possible case), but that's not the only apparent advantage of taking on a6. In this line White usually plays f3 to support the e4-pawn and free the d2-knight, and then White's light-squared bishop normally looks quite 'bad', being blocked in by White's central chain of pawns running from f3 to d5, and exchanging a bad bishop for a potentially useful knight is tempting. In the diagram White only needs to play f3, ♘c4 and ♗f4 to achieve a winning position, so Black cannot afford to waste time. In order to explain why this position is fine for Black, it is necessary to look at the whole board and understand how the queenside and kingside are interconnected.

Let's take a look at a plausible sequence of moves: 12 f3 ♘d7 13 ♘c4 ♘e5 (the knight arrives just in time to prevent ♗f4) 14 ♘xe5 ♗xe5.



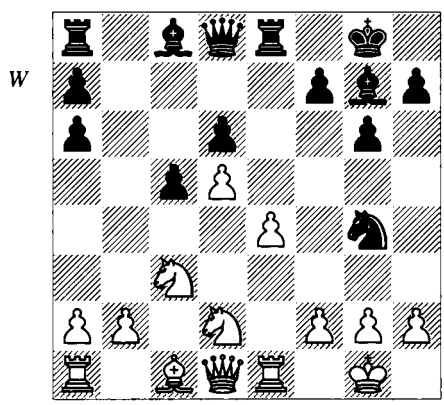
In this position Black has the serious threat of 15...♕h4 16 f4 (16 g3 ♗xg3 17 hxg3 ♕xg3+ 18 ♔h1 ♖e5 19 f4 and now 19...♗g4! wins, but not 19...♖h5+?? 20 ♕xh5 gxh5 21 ♖g1) 16...♗d4+ 17 ♔h1 ♗xc3 18 bxc3 ♖xe4. Snatching the e4-pawn at the cost of giving up the g7-bishop is often very risky, but not here since it takes White several moves to line up his bishop and queen on the long diagonal. So how can White meet this threat? The natural move 15 ♗e3 doesn't defend, so White is more or less forced to play his queen to the second rank, so as to meet the bishop sacrifice on g3 by ♕g2. However, both 15 ♕c2 and 15 ♕e2 have defects. After 15 ♕c2 f5 White can hardly play 16 exf5 ♗xf5, since Black's bishops would then develop terrifying power, especially as ...c4 would secure an outpost on d3 for the light-squared one. Thus 16 ♗e3 is probably best, but after 16...♖b8 White is under unpleasant pressure as Black has several active plans, such as ...f4 followed by ...g5-g4, or ...a5 followed by ...♗a6, or simply ...fxe4. 15 ♕e2 leads to roughly similar problems after 15...♖b8 16 ♗e3 f5, since 17 exf5 ♗g7! (threatening 18...♖xe3) 18 ♔h1 ♗xf5 gives Black strong pressure.

The main point here is that after the exchange on a6, Black has good possibilities to develop activity using a combination of play in all three parts of the board: on the kingside with ...♕h4, on the queenside using ...♖b8 to pressurize b2, and in the centre with the ...f5 break. Each of these possibilities is not dangerous in itself, but becomes so in combination with the others since it is impossible for White to clamp down on Black's activity across the whole board. It is also noticeable that in some lines White sorely misses his light-squared bishop, for example if Black plays ...f5.

12 ♖e1

White decides on an alternative method of defending e4 to prepare ♘c4, but although this does not weaken the dark squares as f3 does, it has other defects.

12...♘g4



Pinpointing the weakness of White's last move, that it left f2 poorly defended. Now Black threatens to win at once by 13...♕h4, so

White is obliged to take immediate defensive action.

13 h3 ♘e5

Both preventing ♘c4 and taking aim at the weak d3-square.

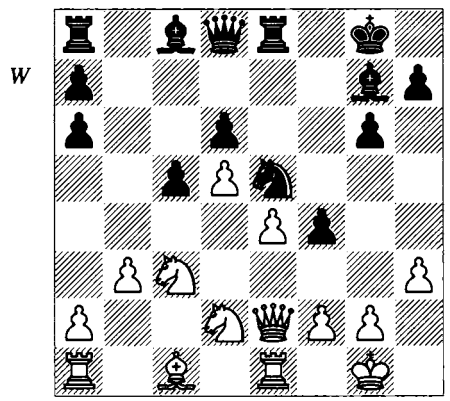
14 ♕e2?!

Playing the queen to a square directly opposite Black's rook is risky. 14 ♘f3 is better, to exchange the dangerous e5-knight, when White still has good chances for equality.

14...f5

Now 15 exf5 loses to 15...♘f3+, so White must allow the pawn to advance to f4.

15 b3 f4



White's central majority is firmly blockaded by the e5-knight, while Black has attacking chances on the kingside based on ...g5-g4. The only real plan for White is to exchange off the dangerous e5-knight.

16 ♗b2 g5 17 ♘f3?!

This should have been prefaced by 17 ♘d1, but even then 17...g4 18 hxg4 ♗xg4 19 f3 ♗d7 followed by ...♕g5 gives Black good attacking possibilities on the kingside.

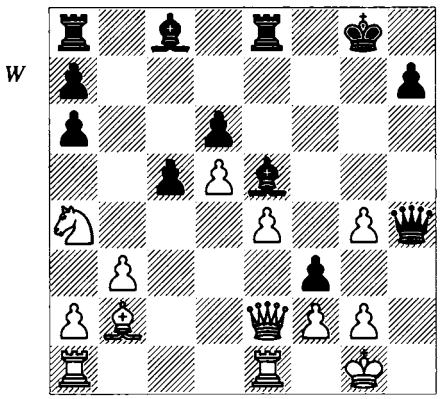
17...g4 18 ♘xe5 ♗xe5

The difficulty for White is that the knight on e5 has been replaced by an equally dangerous bishop. Given sufficient time, White could also exchange this piece off, but he is in trouble since Black already has serious threats on the kingside.

19 hxg4 ♕h4 20 ♘a4

After 20 ♘d1?! f3! 21 ♕xf3 ♗xg4 22 g3 ♕h5 23 ♕h1 ♕xh1+ 24 ♔xh1 ♗xd1 25 ♗xe5 ♗f3+ Black wins a piece.

20...f3!



0-1

The resignation is perhaps a bit early, but after 21 ♕xf3 Black has an instructive win by 21...♕h2+ 22 ♔f1 ♗d7! (after chasing the king to f1 by a check on the h-file, the bishop is positioned to strike from the queenside) 23 ♕h3 (23 ♔e2 ♗b5+ 24 ♔d2 ♖f8 25 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 26 ♕e3 ♗xa4 27 bxa4 ♕b2+ wins for Black) 23...♗b5+ 24 ♖e2 ♕f4! and White is defenceless.

The important points here involve thinking processes at the board. You should not isolate one part of the board from the rest, and not view strategic elements in isolation. Strategic decisions such as giving up a bishop for a knight to double the opponent's pawns often have a long-term impact which affects the entire board and just looking at the short-term consequences may be insufficient to evaluate the decision. It's important to have a holistic view of middlegame play and to keep an eye open for unexpected connections on the chessboard.

Material Imbalances

Middlegame play encompasses a wide range of advantages and disadvantages, and assessing a given position may be quite complicated. However, the first step is always to look at the material balance. If material is equal, then it is necessary to look at other factors, but in this chapter we shall concentrate on situations of material imbalance. Such an imbalance can arise because one side has a material advantage, but it can also occur when the two players have different types of material, even if they are equal on the standard 'point counting' score (queen = 9, rook = 5, bishop or knight = 3 and pawn = 1). For example, one side may have a knight and the other three pawns; this is an imbalance, even though both add up to three points.

One material imbalance which arises often in practice is the advantage of **the exchange**, that is to say rook for bishop or rook for knight. The side with the rook has two extra points, but exploiting this advantage may not be easy. It's usually necessary to give the rook opportunities to penetrate into the enemy position, as in Svidler-Timofeev (page 24). It's even trickier when the side with the minor piece has a pawn for the exchange. That's only a one-point deficit, and this can be balanced by positional factors. Carlsen-Ivanchuk (page 25) shows how a lack of open files may handicap the rook(s) and how the battle may hinge on the ability to open files.

In the middlegame, two minor pieces are almost always worth more than a rook and are usually better than a rook and a pawn, even though both are worth six points on the usual material scale. In Cheparinov-Vallejo Pons (page 26), White has considerable attacking chances as compensation, but when there is a material imbalance, the initiative is especially important. By sacrificing a pawn or two, Black was able to coordinate his forces and then the minor pieces proved much stronger than the rook. The situation is rather different in Bologan-Caruana (page 27). Here Black has a rook and a pawn for two knights, which is the most favourable case for the rook, especially when the knights have few stable squares. However, even in this relatively advantageous case, the rook and pawn are only worth fractionally more than the two knights. In the game an error allowed the rooks to become devastatingly active.

A piece sacrifice in the opening or early middlegame often gives rise to the imbalance of a piece for three pawns. Here a great deal depends on the initiative. In the middlegame, three pawns that are not far advanced don't pose a major threat, and then the piece is more powerful. However, it's another story if the pawns are coupled with attacking chances against an exposed enemy king, as Kokarev-Nayer (page 28) demonstrates. V.Damjanović-Nevednichy (page 29) shows the other side of the coin. Here there are no queens, so White, who has the three pawns, doesn't have many attacking chances. However, there are still enough pieces on the board to provide Black with some active play to keep White from slowly advancing his passed pawns. The chances slightly favour Black, allowing him to apply persistent pressure which eventually led to White's downfall.

Another common material advantage is that of queen vs rook and minor piece, which represents a one-point advantage. In most cases, exchanges favour the side with a material advantage, but in this case liquidation to an ending doesn't necessarily guarantee success because of the danger of a **fortress**, a situation in which the defender's position is totally secure and cannot be broken into. Thus the player with the queen must make sure that if he plays for exchanges, the result will not be a fortress. Ivanchuk-Nisipeanu (page 30) is an example of good technique in which Ivanchuk makes sure that Black cannot set up a fortress by undermining the squares the bishop might settle on. If the side with the rook and minor piece has an extra pawn, the material situation is roughly level on points, and then the initiative is often the key factor. The queen is at its best when on the attack, and if it is forced to adopt a passive role, the enemy forces may have the upper hand. Leitão-Caruana (page 31) is a good example of this. Black seized the initiative early on, but at a crucial moment White decided to grab a pawn instead of playing to generate counterplay, leading to a rapid defeat.

In general, two rooks are worth slightly more than a queen, but the type of position is an important factor. The two rooks prefer a quiet position in which they can manoeuvre to attack one vulnerable pawn after another. Since the rooks can attack a pawn twice, while the queen can only defend it once, such a battle can only end one way. The side with the queen needs active play in order to keep the rooks off-balance. Ivanchuk-Leko (page 32) demonstrates what happens when the play dries up and also shows that the rooks need open files in order to become active. The queen is at its best when there are attacking chances against the enemy king, since it can easily check an exposed king, gaining time and providing many opportunities for forks. In Dreev-Zhou Jianchao (page 33), the queen's attacking potential is used to good effect, and this example also illustrates the principle that a queen and knight often work well together when conducting an attack against the enemy king.

An interesting imbalance is that of a queen against three minor pieces. Although this represents theoretical material equality, in most middlegame positions the three minor pieces have the upper hand. The queen faces similar problems as against two rooks; given time, the minor pieces can gang up on targets which the queen cannot defend by itself. Nayer-Avrukh (page 34) is a typical example, in which the side with the queen even has an extra pawn. To begin with, the minor pieces are poorly coordinated and the queen can keep harassing them, but it only takes one slip for the pieces to get their act together and target a key pawn. The following example, Vorobiov-Beshukov (page 35), has the same material balance but here White's queen comes out on top. The key difference is that there are still many pawns on the board, and the pawn-structure is fluid, so White can use his pawns to deny the enemy minor pieces effective squares and gradually squeeze Black to death.

Giving up a queen for two minor pieces is a considerable sacrifice and in most cases the only adequate type of compensation is a direct attack on the king. In Svetushkin-Landa (page 36), White gives up his queen to trap the enemy king in the centre of the board. Although the attack takes time to reach its full force, there's little Black can do as White's active pieces chase the enemy king around. As a warning to those who sacrifice without careful thought, Al Modiahki-Kveinys (page 37) shows how a superficially tempting sacrifice can backfire. White seems to have good positional compensation for his sacrifice, but Black identifies the key elements of the position and by accurate defence manages to refute White's ambitious play.

The next two sections deal with the common situation in which one side has an extra pawn. It's essential to be flexible since in some cases, such as Carlsen-Adams (page 38), the right strategy is to hang on to the pawn even if this means some temporary inconvenience. In others, such as Carlsen-Kramnik (page 39), the correct plan is to return the extra material in order to gain a positional advantage or seize the initiative. If you are going to hang on to the extra pawn, it's essential to make sure that you can really keep it. It's easy to get the worst of both worlds by placing your pieces passively to keep the pawn, only to be forced to surrender it later under much less favourable circumstances, leaving you worse off than if you had returned the pawn straight away.

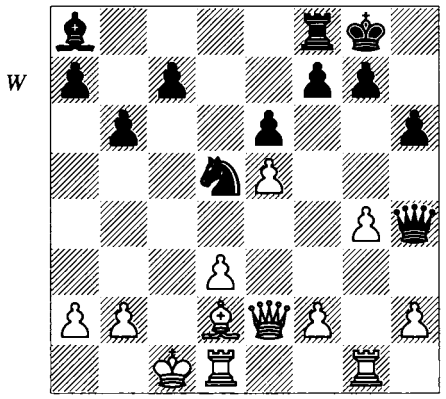
When you are a pawn down, you should try to make the most of any assets in your position and search for counterplay. In Kramnik-L.Dominguez (page 40), Black profited from his knight outpost and queenside majority and, aided by some inaccuracies, managed to save what looked like a nearly hopeless position. If you have no chance of active play then it's more difficult, since you are restricted to countering your opponent's plans and putting obstacles in his path. In Ivanchuk-Leko (page 41), Black used exactly this strategy to save the game.

The next two sections deal with the eternal battle of bishop against knight. Although both are valued at three points, their strengths vary according to the position, and are especially affected by the central pawn-structure. Positions with an open centre favour bishops, while positions with a blocked centre benefit knights. Miles-Timman (page 42) shows the bishop at its best, positioned on an empty long diagonal aimed at the enemy king. Anand-Radjabov (page 43) is an interesting example because although the bishop appears to be well posted, its effectiveness is limited by the pawn-structure.

It's always important to be aware of exceptions, and the general principles mentioned above are only guides. In the next section we look at some apparently paradoxical exchanges of minor pieces. In Nisipeanu-Radjabov (page 44), White gives up a strong bishop for the enemy knight in order to exert immediate pressure on Black's centre. In Finocchiario-Van Oosterom (page 45), the opposite occurs: a well-placed knight is exchanged for an ineffective bishop because this enables Black to eliminate any possibility of counterplay.

Finally, in Section 12 we look at the two bishops. Two bishops are better than any other combination of minor pieces in quite a wide range of middlegame positions. Their power in open positions is well-known, but they are also effective in many semi-open positions, mainly because a bishop that has no opposite number can become very powerful. Movsesian-Gashimov (page 46) is a good example of exploiting the bishops. It's worth noting how White's light-squared bishop, which initially seemed to have limited prospects, eventually became a real powerhouse. Gelfand-Elianov (page 47) shows the opposite: here a lead in development and good central control allowed Elianov to throttle the enemy bishops by establishing powerful outposts for his knights.

1 Advantage of the Exchange



Svidler – Timofeev
Russian Ch, Moscow 2009

White has a whole extra exchange and indeed stands to win, but in practice such positions are easily misplayed. Svidler gives a good demonstration of the correct method. Rooks require open files to develop their maximum activity. Currently there are no such files, so one of White's goals is to create one. Note that Black is not without some positional compensation in the form of his active bishop and secure central knight. A typical mistake for players with extra material is to waste time and assume that the position will win itself. If Black had enough time, he could develop counterplay by advancing his queenside pawns, for example by ...c5, ...♖c8 and ...b5, which would make White's task harder. Therefore White should, without taking unnecessary risks, seek to develop active play for his rooks without delay.

20 f4!

This defends the attacked h-pawn while at the same time preparing to open a file by f5. Note that 20 g5? h5 is wrong, because if Black follows up with ...g6 then the kingside pawn-structure will be completely blocked and White will be unable to open a file for his rooks.

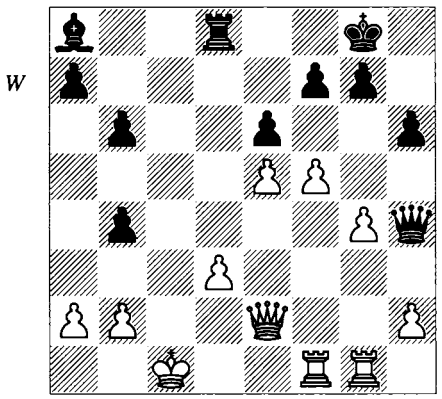
20...♖d8 21 ♖df1

Simpler than 21 f5 exf5 22 gxf5 ♘f4; there's no need to enter complications.

21...c5 22 f5

The threat is 23 fxe6 fxe6 24 g5 h5 25 g6, so Black has to take some action.

22...♘b4 23 ♗xb4 cxb4



24 ♕f2

Another typical strategy when material ahead is to play for exchanges. After 24...♕xf2 25 ♖xf2 ♖xd3 26 ♖d1 the rooks are also exchanged, after which White's other rook penetrates along the c-file with deadly effect.

24...♕e7 25 ♕e3!

While it's not bad to exchange on e6, White finds an even stronger move. Delaying the exchange gives White the extra option of f6, breaking open Black's kingside.

25...b3 26 ♔b1

So as to meet 26...bxa2+ by 27 ♔a1, tucking the king away safely in the corner.

26...♕b4 27 a3 ♕b5 28 ♖d1

28 fxe6 fxe6 29 ♖g3 keeps the rook on the open f-file and prepares to break into Black's kingside by g5-g6. However, Svidler's method is good enough.

28...♕c5 29 d4 ♕d5 30 ♖g3

A change of direction. White takes aim at the b3-pawn and so forces Black to exchange queens in unfavourable circumstances.

30...♕e4+ 31 ♕xe4 ♗xe4+ 32 ♔c1

White need not fear ...♖c8+ due to ♖c3.

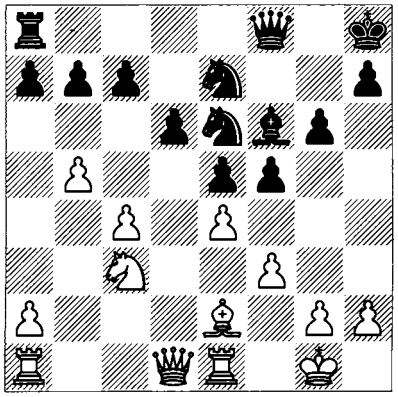
32...exf5 33 gxf5 ♗xf5

Black takes the pawn, but now White's passed d-pawn becomes a major force.

34 d5 ♖e8 35 d6 ♔f8 36 ♖xb3 ♗d7 37 ♖e3 ♖e6

37...f6 is met by 38 e6!.

38 ♖dd3 ♔e8 39 ♖c3 a5 40 ♔d2 1-0



Carlsen – Ivanchuk
Foros 2008

Here's a trickier case. Black has a pawn for the exchange and in addition White's bishop is blocked in by its own pawns, leaving him with almost no dark-square control. Moreover, there is no immediate prospect of White opening a file for his rooks. Objectively, the position is equal.

19 c5!

Carlsen decides to offer a second pawn in order to free his bishop. This is a good decision, as otherwise Black could play ...♘c5, blocking the pawn, and then slowly prepare an attack by advancing his kingside pawns. As before, it's essential for White to undertake positive action; waiting would simply allow Black to improve his position without hindrance.

19...♘xc5 20 ♗c4

At the cost of a pawn, White's bishop has become active and bears down on Black's position. In particular, the c5-knight cannot easily switch to the kingside since e6 is covered by the bishop.

20...♗g5 21 ♕e2! ♕h6 22 ♖ad1

It's important not to allow Black's bishop to become active at e3 or d2. The inactivity of this bishop is the main defect of Black's position, and if this problem could be solved, Black would have a clear advantage.

22...♖f8 23 a4 b6

Black seeks to prevent a5 followed by b6, which would undermine the d6-pawn.

24 g3

Denying the bishop squares, and preparing ♔g2 to consolidate White's kingside position.

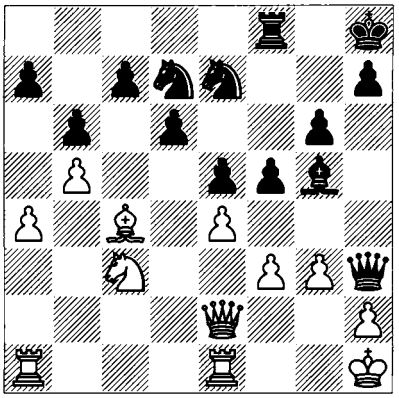
24...♕h3 25 ♕g2 ♕h6 26 ♕e2 ♕h3 27 ♔h1

Playing for the win.

27...♘d7?!

The start of a poor plan involving the transfer of this knight to the kingside. It's unlikely that Black's attack will be strong enough to force mate, and removing the knight leaves Black's queenside vulnerable. 27...♕h6 or 27...♕h5 is better, maintaining equality.

28 ♖a1!



Transferring the rook to a2 is an excellent plan, since it is useful defensively along the second rank and supports a possible a5.

28...♕h6 29 ♖a2 ♘f6 30 ♔g2?

30 ♗e6! is more accurate.

30...♘h5?

Missing his chance to play 30...f4!, when after 31 ♗e6 fxg3 32 hxg3 ♘h5 33 ♗g4 ♘xg3 34 ♔xg3 ♗f4+ 35 ♔g2 ♕h2+ 36 ♔f1 ♕h1+ Black forces a draw.

31 ♘d5 ♘xd5 32 ♗xd5

White is clearly better. Black's attack is not dangerous and White has good queenside play by a5 or by attacking the c-pawn with ♖c2.

32...♗f4 33 ♕f2 fxe4 34 ♗xe4 ♕g5 35 ♖c2 d5?

This tactic opens the position and allows White's rooks to break out. 35...♖f7 is better, although after 36 ♗b7 White can easily improve his position by, for example, ♖e4 or ♗c8-g4.

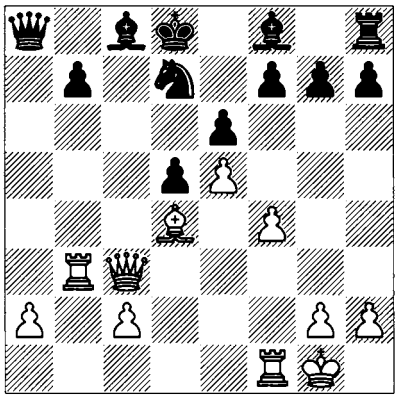
36 ♗xd5 ♗xg3 37 hxg3 ♘f4+ 38 ♔f1 ♘xd5 39 ♖ce2!

The e-pawn is doomed after 39...♖f5 40 g4 or 39...♖e8 40 f4.

39...♕f6 40 ♖xe5 ♕xf3 41 ♕xf3 ♖xf3+ 42 ♔e2 ♖f5 43 ♖xf5 gxf5 44 ♔d3 c5 45 ♖e5 ♘b4+ 46 ♔d2 1-0

2 Rook vs Two Minor Pieces

Two minor pieces are generally worth more than a rook in all phases of the game. In the middlegame, two minor pieces are worth more than a rook and a pawn in the great majority of cases, whereas in the endgame they are more or less balanced. In almost any situation, the two bishops are worth more than other minor-piece combinations. The key difference between the middlegame and the endgame is that the attacking chances provided by the two minor pieces are only relevant in the middlegame, and are especially valuable when queens are still on the board. Moreover, as the game progresses, files tend to be opened, which enhances the power of the rooks.



Cheparinov – Vallejo Pons
Dresden Olympiad 2008

Black has two minor pieces for a rook, but his development is poor and his king is somewhat exposed to attack. However, by activating his pieces, even at the cost of a pawn or two, Black is able to gain the advantage.

19 f5 b6

Both freeing the c8-bishop and allowing the f8-bishop to be developed to c5.

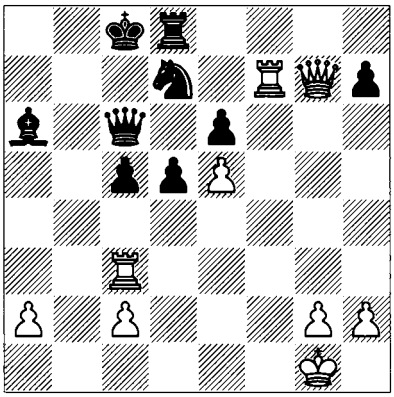
20 fxe6

20 ♗xb6+ ♘xb6 21 ♖xb6 ♕a3 is very good for Black.

20...fxe6 21 ♕e3 ♕c6 22 ♖c3 ♗c5!

The materialistic 22...♘c5 would leave Black under pressure after 23 ♖f7. The move played prepares to surrender the kingside pawns for the sake of piece activity.

23 ♖f7 ♗a6 24 ♗xc5 bxc5 25 ♕g5+ ♔c8 26 ♕xg7 ♖d8



Black's bishop and knight are worth six points on the standard material scale, the same as White's rook and pawn, but Black has a large advantage. White's initiative has disappeared, and in fact it is now Black who has attacking chances, while White has many weak pawns.

27 ♕xh7?

27 h3 is better, although 27...c4 followed by ...d4 is excellent for Black.

27...d4?

Missing an immediate win by 27...♕a4!, when it's White's king that is fatally exposed; for example, 28 ♖f2 ♕d4 followed by ...♕d1+ or 28 ♖cf3 ♕d4+ 29 ♖f2 ♕d1+.

28 ♖g3 c4

Black's mobile pawns are a major asset.

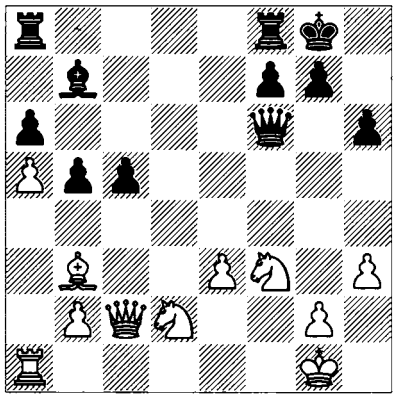
29 ♖f1 ♕c5 30 ♔h1 ♕xe5 31 ♖g8 ♗b7 32 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 33 ♕h4+ ♔c7 34 ♖e1 ♕g7 35 ♕f2 e5

A typical situation in which the minor pieces overwhelm the rook. White has no active play and can only wait while Black improves his position. Note how the threats against White's king severely limit his mobility.

36 ♕e2 ♗c6 37 a4 c3 38 a5 e4 39 ♖d1 ♘c5 40 a6 e3 41 ♕f1 ♘e6

Threatening an immediate win by 42...e2 43 ♕xe2 ♘f4.

42 ♖b1 e2 43 ♕f2 ♕g4 44 ♕f7+ ♔d6 45 ♕f2 ♔c5 46 ♕g3 ♕xg3 47 hxg3 d3 48 cxd3 c2 49 ♖c1 ♔d4 50 ♔g1 ♔e3 0-1



Bologan – Caruana
Reggio Emilia 2009/10

Once again two minor pieces face a rook and a pawn, but this case is very different. First of all, White has the two knights, which is the worst pair of minor pieces in a position like this, which is open and does not provide support-points for the knights. Secondly, the position is tailor-made for Black's rooks, with both the e-file and especially the open d-file offering attractive posts. Thirdly, White's attacking chances are non-existent. These factors more than balance the advantage conferred by the two minor pieces in the middlegame, and the position is slightly better for Black. However, White is far from lost; a crucial factor is whether his bishop can develop any activity.

25...c4 26 ♗a2 ♖ad8 27 ♖e1 ♖fe8?!

This slight inaccuracy gives White the chance to develop more activity than was really necessary. 27...♖d3 28 ♗b1 ♖fd8 29 ♕c1 ♖3d7 retains an edge.

28 e4?!

White slips up in return. He intends to activate his bishop by playing b3, but he can't do this at once since 28 b3? loses to 28...c3 followed by ...♗xf3. Therefore White first blocks off the b7-bishop, but this plan fails tactically. White should give up on the idea of opening the a2-g8 diagonal and instead switch the bishop to the parallel b1-h7 diagonal by 28 ♗b1!. Then 28...g6 29 e4 ♖e6 30 e5 or 28...♖d3 29 b3 ♗xf3 30 ♘xf3 ♖xb3 31 ♕h7+ ♔f8 32 ♘d4 ♖b2 33 ♗e4! provides White with enough activity to maintain the balance.

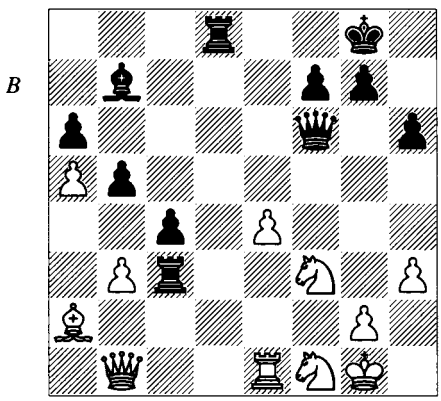
28...♖d3 29 b3?

The logical follow-up to White's previous move, but 29 ♗b1 is still the correct idea, although it is less effective than a move earlier as the e4-pawn blocks the diagonal to h7.

29...♖ed8 30 ♘f1

30 bxc4 is no better because Black has a very strong attack after 30...♖c3 31 ♕b2 ♖xf3 32 e5 ♕g5 33 ♘xf3 ♗xf3, threatening ...♖d2.

30...♖c3 31 ♕b1



31...♖dd3 32 bxc4 ♖xf3!

This refutes White's plan since his poorly coordinated and offside pieces are unable to cope with Black's threats.

33 gxf3 ♖xf3

Threatening 34...♕g5+ followed by ...♖f2.

34 ♖e2 ♖xh3?

34...♕g5+! is correct. After 35 ♖g2 (35 ♔h2 ♗c8 36 ♖g2 ♕f4+ wins for Black) 35...♕c5+ 36 ♔h2 ♗c8 37 ♘g3 ♗xh3! 38 ♖g1 ♗g4 (threatening 39...♖f2+ 40 ♖g2 ♗f3) 39 ♖g2 h5 followed by ...h4 Black has a decisive attack.

35 ♕e1?!

35 ♕b2! offers better defensive chances.

35...bxc4?

35...b4! 36 ♗b1 ♖f3 37 ♘g3 g6, intending ...h5-h4, gives Black unpleasant pressure.

36 ♗b1?

The obvious 36 ♗xc4 offers White excellent drawing chances.

36...c3

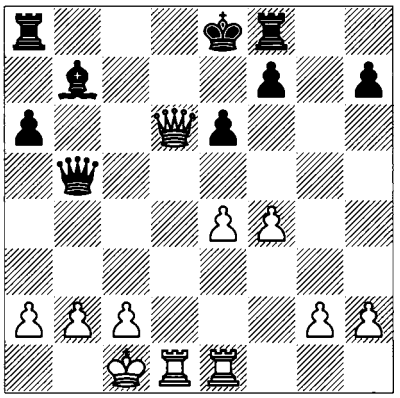
Now Black again has a definite advantage.

37 ♖e3 ♕g5+ 38 ♘g3??

38 ♔f2 keeps White in the game.

38...h5 39 ♔g2 ♕g4 40 ♖xc3 h4 41 ♖b3 hxg3 0-1

3 Piece for Three Pawns



Kokarev – Nayer
Ulan Ude 2009

This is a theoretical position arising from a piece sacrifice in the Najdorf Sicilian. White has three pawns for the piece, but they are not very far-advanced. In general, three such pawns do not provide enough compensation for a piece in the middlegame unless there are other factors involved. In this case Black's king is exposed and his f8-rook is out of play, and this tips the balance slightly in White's favour.

19...♖c8?!

This is an inaccuracy because it commits the rook too soon. 19...♕c6 20 ♕d2 ♕c7! is a better defence, threatening ...♖d8.

20 ♖e3

Threatening to win at once by 21 ♖c3. The reply is forced.

20...♕c6 21 ♕d2 ♕c7 22 ♖c3 ♕e7 23 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8

The exchange of rooks helps White, because Black is left with the inactive rook on f8.

24 ♕c3 ♕b7 25 ♖d4 ♗d7 26 b3

When you have three pawns for a piece, it's important not to create any weaknesses which give the side with the piece a target to attack. Unless the pawns are already far-advanced, they should be advanced cautiously, making sure not to create unnecessary weaknesses.

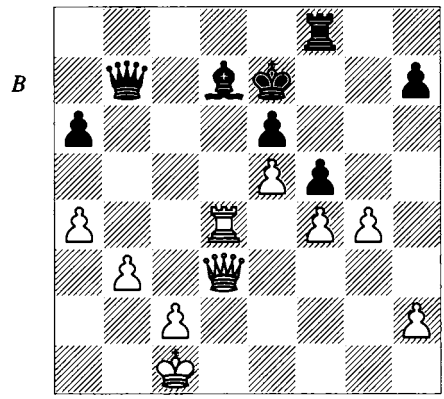
26...f6 27 a4 ♔f7 28 ♕d3 ♔e7 29 e5

Black's king is never really safe. Here White exploits the weak h-pawn.

29...f5?

This allows White to play g4-g5, which greatly improves his chances in an ending because he can make an outside passed pawn on the kingside. 29...fxe5 30 ♕xh7+ ♖f7 31 ♕h4+ ♔e8 32 ♕h8+ ♔e7 33 ♕xe5 ♕xg2 is better, when although White still has an advantage, at least there are chances for counterplay.

30 g4!



30...♔e8

30...fxg4 31 ♕xh7+ ♖f7 32 ♕h4+ ♔f8 33 ♔b2!, with ♕xg4 or ♖d6 to come, gives White a decisive advantage, so Black must allow the pawn to advance further.

31 g5

Black is lost. He still has no counterplay since White's king is safe and his pawns are all secure. The result is that Black cannot do anything to stop White improving his position, for example by playing ♖d6 and targeting the weak a-pawn.

31...♖f7 32 ♖d6 ♕b4 33 ♕d2

Defending f4 and offering a queen swap. If Black declines, White can easily make progress by, for example, ♔b2, a5 and ♖b6.

33...♕xd2+ 34 ♔xd2 ♗c8 35 h4 h5

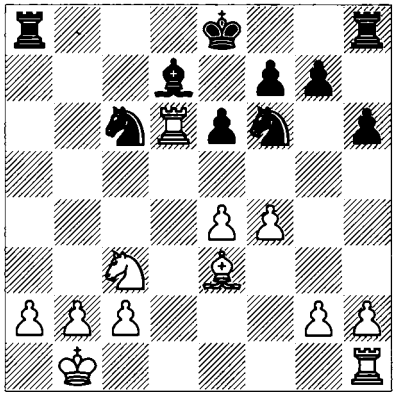
This prevents the further advance of the h-pawn, but gives White a protected passed pawn.

36 b4 ♖b7 37 c3 ♔e7

Now White has a decisive liquidation, but the position was lost in any case.

38 ♖xa6 ♖d7+ 39 ♖d6 ♖xd6+ 40 exd6+ ♔xd6 41 b5 e5 42 fxe5+ ♔xe5 43 a5 ♔d6 44 a6 ♔c7 45 ♔e3 ♗d7 46 c4 ♔b6 47 g6 ♗e6 48 c5+ ♔xb5 49 a7 1-0

B



V. Damjanović – Nevednichy
Bucharest 1996

Another position resulting from a Sicilian piece sacrifice, but this is more favourable for Black than the previous example. The first point is that the queens have been exchanged, so Black has little to fear regarding his king. Secondly, Black's kingside pawn-structure is intact, while White must watch out as his e4-pawn is slightly weak (indeed, White would prefer his f-pawn to be on f3, which would solidify his centre and give Black fewer possibilities for counterplay). Nevertheless, the power of the three connected queenside pawns should not be underestimated even if they are all currently on the second rank, and the position is roughly level.

16...♘e7

Black intends to target the e4-pawn with ...♗c6 and therefore positions his knights so as to occupy d5 if White plays e5.

17 ♖hd1 ♗c6 18 ♗b6 ♘d7

18...0-0?? is impossible due to 19 ♗d8, so Black must meet the mate threat by retreating his knight.

19 ♗f2 ♖c8

White's pieces are actively placed and there's no obvious way to improve their position, so it's time to start pushing the queenside pawns.

20 a4 ♘f6 21 ♗h4?!

The point of this move is that it indirectly defends the e4-pawn (21...♘xe4? 22 ♖xc6 and 21...♗xe4? 22 ♗xf6 both win for White). However, it gives Black the perfect opportunity to solve his main problem, the inactive h8-rook, by playing ...♖g8 and ...g5. 21 ♖6d4 is a better way of defending the e4-pawn and maintains the balance.

21...♖g8! 22 ♗xf6

Rather than see his kingside pawns broken up by ...g5, White exchanges his bishop, but this opens a file for the enemy rook.

22...gxf6 23 g3 f5

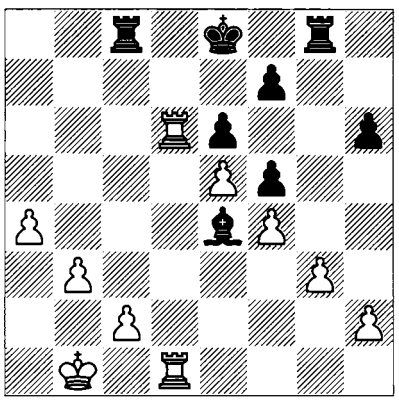
By undermining the e4-pawn, Black gains squares in the centre for his pieces.

24 e5 ♘d5 25 ♘xd5?!

This makes things easier for Black. Now his bishop reaches e4, which will tie White down to the defence of the c2-pawn, while he can bring the g8-rook into play by ...h5-h4. 25 ♘b5 offers better chances.

25...♗xd5 26 b3 ♗e4

W



27 ♖6d2 h5 28 ♔b2 h4 29 ♖g1

29 gxh4 ♖g4 30 ♖f2 ♖xh4 31 a5 ♖h3, with ...♖hc3 to come, is also good for Black.

29...♔e7

Now that White's rooks are not doubled on the d-file, Black can clear the back rank and bring his g8-rook into play.

30 c4 ♖cd8 31 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 32 ♔c3?

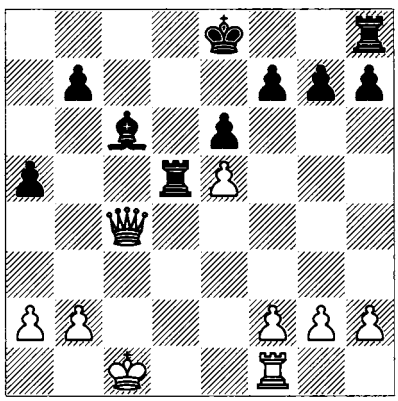
This loses straight away as Black can secure a passed h-pawn. Although White is on the defensive, he still has drawing chances after the best defence 32 gxh4. One line is 32...♖d2+ 33 ♔c3 ♖d3+ 34 ♔b4 ♖f3 35 a5 ♖xf4 36 h5 ♖h4 37 a6 f4 38 ♔c3 f3 39 b4 ♖xh5 40 ♔d4 ♗a8 41 b5 ♖xh2 42 b6 ♖b2 43 b7 ♗xb7 44 axb7 ♖xb7 45 ♖f1 and now it is a clear draw.

32...♖d3+ 33 ♔b4 h3! 34 a5 ♖d2 35 a6 ♖xh2 36 ♖a1 ♖g2 37 ♔b5 ♖xg3 38 a7 h2 39 a8♕ ♗xa8 40 ♖a7+ ♗b7 41 ♖xb7+ ♔f8 0-1

4 Queen vs Rook and Minor Piece

A queen is worth more than a rook and a minor piece, but it's often tricky to win such positions. Liquidation to an ending is not necessarily a guarantee of success because in many positions the rook and minor piece can set up a fortress in which everything is defended and the superior side cannot make progress. It follows that when exchanging off pieces, considerable care has to be taken to avoid a fortress situation.

W



Ivanchuk – Nisipeanu
Foros 2007

19 ♖d1!

An accurate move. Rather than defend the attacked e5-pawn, White exchanges rooks immediately, forcing Black to recapture with the bishop. This leaves the a5-pawn vulnerable to attack.

19...0-0

Not 19...♖xe5? 20 ♕d4 ♖d5 21 ♕xg7 and White wins material.

20 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 21 ♕a4 ♗xg2

There's no perfect solution for Black. 21...b6 leaves the queenside pawns vulnerable to attack and after 22 f3 g6 23 b3 White threatens ♕d7-c7.

22 ♕xa5 ♗d5

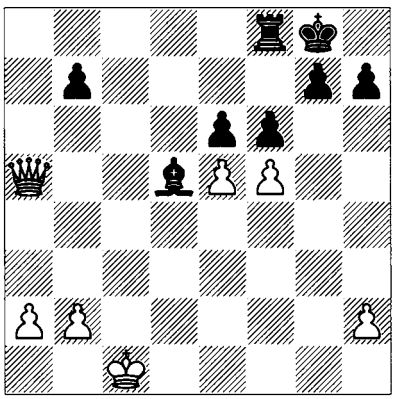
Black's bishop remains well posted, but now White has a queenside majority with which he can create a passed pawn, an important step in winning endings with a queen against a rook and a minor piece.

23 f4 f6

Trying to open the f-file to develop counterplay with the rook.

24 f5!

B



This temporary pawn sacrifice destabilizes the enemy bishop. The side opposing the queen should try to place pieces on securely-defended squares since the queen's forking power can readily take advantage of undefended pieces.

24...fxe5 25 fxe6 ♗xe6 26 b3

White must keep the queenside pawns to have any winning chances.

26...e4

There's no reasonable way to defend the b7-pawn so Black tries to secure counterplay with the e-pawn.

27 ♕b5 ♗f7 28 ♕xb7 e3 29 ♕b5 h6

After 29...♖e8 30 ♔d1 White is just in time to stop the pawn.

30 ♔d1 g5 31 ♕e2 ♖d8+ 32 ♔e1 ♖d2

32...♖e8 33 ♕d3 e2 34 a4 is an easy win for White as the e-pawn presents no real danger.

33 ♕xe3 ♖xa2 34 b4 ♖xh2 35 b5

The b-pawn is too strong and Black is unable to give up his bishop for it.

35...♖b2 36 b6 g4

36...♗d5 37 ♕c1! ♖b3 38 ♕c2, threatening 39 ♕xb3, is also winning for White.

37 ♕xh6 ♖b1+

After 37...g3 38 ♕g5+ ♔h7 39 ♕h4+ White wins the pawn with check.

38 ♔f2 ♖b3 39 ♕c6 1-0

Black will have to surrender his rook for the white pawn.

Leitão – Caruana
Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010

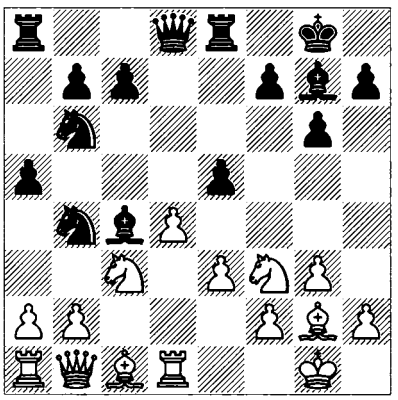
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 ♗g2 ♘b6 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 e3 0-0 9 0-0 ♖e8 10 ♖e1

Although this has been played quite often, it feels slightly artificial since it's not clear that the rook will be best placed on e1.

10...a5

Black's long-term plan involves the central break ...e5, but he is in no rush and first improves his position on the queenside.

11 ♕e2 ♗e6 12 ♖d1?! ♗c4 13 ♕c2 ♘b4 14 ♕b1 e5!



This strong move prepares the following queen sacrifice and forces White to play accurately if he is to maintain the balance.

15 a3

Another key line is 15 b3 exd4 16 bxc4 dxc3 17 ♖xd8 ♖axd8 (Black has only a rook for the queen, but his raging initiative and dangerous c3-pawn guarantee him at least equality) 18 ♕b3 c2 19 ♘d4 ♖xd4 20 exd4 ♖e1+ 21 ♗f1 ♗xd4 22 a3 ♗xa1 23 ♗h6 ♗g7 24 axb4 ♗xh6 25 ♕xc2 axb4 with a likely draw.

The tactical point of Black's play is 15 dxe5? ♕xd1+! 16 ♘xd1 ♗d3, winning the exchange.

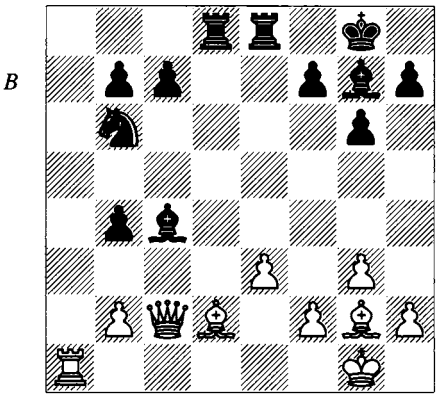
15...exd4 16 axb4 dxc3 17 ♖xd8 ♖axd8 18 ♕c2

White can force a draw by 18 bxc3 ♖d1+ 19 ♗f1 ♗xf1 (19...♖xf1+ 20 ♔g2 ♗xc3 21 bxa5 ♖d1 22 g4 can only be better for White) 20 ♕c2 ♗e2+ 21 ♔g2 ♗f1+ and by now this was his safest option.

18...axb4 19 ♘d2

A sad necessity. Black was threatening the deadly 19...b3, and 19 bxc3 (19 b3? loses at once to 19...♗d3 20 ♕a2 ♖a8) 19...b3 20 ♕b2 ♖d1+ 21 ♗f1 ♖xf1+ 22 ♔g2 ♘d5 gives Black a clear advantage, so White has to jettison a piece.

19...cxd2 20 ♗xd2



Now we have a queen vs rook, knight and pawn situation. Although material is numerically equal, this position shows the main weakness of the queen: its power is limited when there is nothing to attack. Having the initiative is very important for the queen, but here the initiative is definitely in Black's hands in view of his active pieces and White's weak back rank.

20...♖a8 21 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 22 ♗xb7?

Grabbing this hot pawn is throwing gasoline on the fire. 22 h4! is best, and after 22...♖a1+ 23 ♔h2 b3 24 ♕e4 ♗xb2 25 ♕e8+ ♔g7 26 h5 White has enough kingside counterplay to hold the balance. This line emphasizes again how important it is for the side with the queen to have active play.

22...♖a1+ 23 ♗c1

Or 23 ♔g2 ♗f1+ 24 ♔f3 ♘c4 25 ♗xb4 ♘e5+ 26 ♔f4 ♘d3+ 27 ♔f3 ♖c1 28 ♕a4 ♘e5+ 29 ♔f4 ♖c4+ 30 e4 ♘d3+ 31 ♔f3 ♘xb4 and Black is much better.

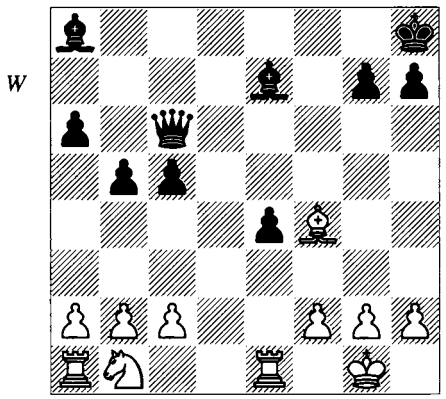
23...b3 24 ♕d1?

Suicide, but even 24 ♕d2 ♗e6 25 ♔g2 ♘c4 26 ♕d1 h5 is hopeless; White is paralysed, and after securing his king by ...♔h7 Black will be ready to grab the b2-pawn and promote his own pawn.

24...♗xb2 0-1

5 Queen vs Two Rooks

Two rooks are worth slightly more than a queen, but much depends on the position. The rooks benefit from open files and the possibility of lining up against enemy pawns. They are poor at combining duties and cannot easily go on the attack if they are tied down by defensive responsibilities. Therefore a safe king is an important asset when playing with the rooks. Conversely, the side with the queen should attempt to weaken the enemy king position.



Ivanchuk – Leko
Morelia/Linares 2008

21 ♗e3

It's essential to prevent Black from opening the long diagonal by ...e3.

21...♕f6 22 c3

A crucial moment. White is marginally ahead on material, but he is behind in development. Black should have enough play to hold the balance, but he cannot afford to wait while White completes his development and opens lines.

22...♗d6?!

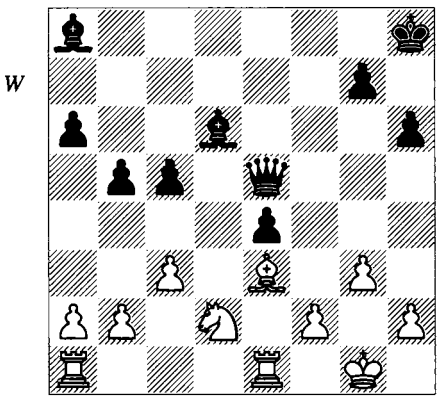
Black plays to force g3, but with the e4-pawn blocking the long diagonal, this weakness is not serious. Pushing the h-pawn by 22...h5! is a better way to create counterplay on the kingside.

23 ♘d2 ♕e5?!

After this slip White secures a clear advantage. 23...♗c6!? is better, preventing the opening of the a-file.

24 g3 h6

It's already too late for 24...♗c6? since 25 ♗f4 ♕e6 26 ♗xd6 e3 27 ♖xe3 ♕xd6 28 ♖ae1 g5 29 ♘e4 ♕d5 30 f3 gives White a large advantage.



25 a4!

Opening a second file gives the rooks more scope.

25...♗c6 26 axb5 axb5 27 ♘b3?

27 c4! is correct. 27...♕xb2? loses to 28 ♖a6!, while after 27...b4 28 ♖a6 ♕e8 29 ♘b3 Black's pawns are easily targeted by White's pieces.

27...♗f8 28 ♖ed1 ♗d5! 29 h4 ♔g8

There's nothing wrong with this, although the safest line is 29...♗xb3 30 ♖d8 ♔g8 31 ♖aa8 ♕f5, when White cannot do more than reach a drawn opposite-coloured bishop position with an extra pawn.

30 ♘c1 g5 31 hxg5 hxg5 32 ♖a5 ♕c7 33 ♖a6 ♕f7 34 ♖b6 ♗e7?!

Too passive. 34...♗g7! maintains the balance, intending ...♗e6-h3 with threats against White's king. If White replies 35 ♗xg5, then 35...♗d4! 36 cxd4 e3 gives Black at least a draw.

35 ♖xb5 ♗e6 36 ♖b8+ ♔g7 37 ♖b7 ♔h6 38 ♖e1?

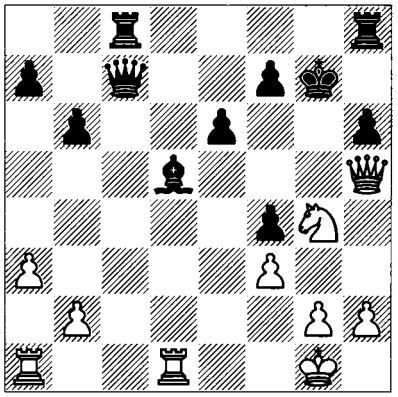
A serious error. 38 ♘e2! followed by ♖b6 is very strong, since 38...♗h3 is well met by 39 ♖d8! with a possible check on h8.

38...♕f6?

After 38...♗h3!, threatening 39...♕f3, Black has dangerous threats since 39 ♔h2 ♗g4 followed by ...♗f3 is very awkward.

39 ♖b6! ♕f5 40 ♘b3 ♔h5 41 ♘d2 ♗d7 42 ♖a1 ♗d8 43 ♖b8 1-0

The queen's greatest power is its ability to attack in several directions at once and thereby create forks. Undefended enemy pieces are especially vulnerable to a rampaging queen, while if the enemy king is exposed to checks, the possibilities for a deadly fork are dramatically increased.



Dreev – Zhou Jianchao
Moscow 2008

White has already sacrificed a pawn to generate threats against Black's king, but although his kingside has been weakened, the black queen's control of e5 means that White has no immediate method of pressing home the attack.

28 ♖ac1!

This is a well-calculated liquidation. White offers two rooks for Black's queen, but in return the e5-square becomes available. It might appear that White's king will be exposed to the attack of Black's rooks as it is currently confined to the first two ranks, but White has worked out that Black cannot exploit this factor.

28...♕xc1

Black has no choice, since after, for example, 28...♕d8 29 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 30 ♕e5+ ♔h7 31 ♕xf4 ♕f8 32 ♖c1 followed by ♖c7 White has a massive attack without any material sacrifice.

29 ♕e5+!

It is important to play this now, because after 29 ♖xc1? ♖xc1+ 30 ♔f2 ♖c2+ 31 ♔e1 f5 White's queen is cut off from the e5-square. Then 32 ♘e5 ♔f6 33 ♕g6+ ♔xe5 34 ♕g7+ ♔d6 35 ♕xh8 ♖xg2 leaves White with little or no advantage.

29...♔h7

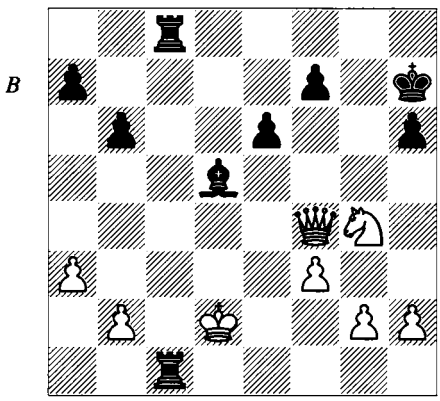
Or 29...♔g8 30 ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 31 ♔f2 ♖c2+ 32 ♔e1 ♗c4 33 ♕xf4, with decisive threats such as 34 ♘f6+ ♔f8 35 ♕d6+ ♔g7 36 ♘h5+ ♔h7 37 ♕g3 or simply 34 ♘e5.

30 ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 31 ♔f2 ♖c2+ 32 ♔e1 ♖c1+

After 32...♖hc8 33 ♕xf4 f5 34 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 35 ♕g6+ ♔f8 36 ♘e3 ♖c1+ 37 ♔f2 ♗a2 38 h4 the h-pawn will be lethal since the white knight nullifies any possible counterplay by Black.

33 ♔d2 ♖hc8 34 ♕xf4

34 ♕f6 ♔g8 35 ♘xh6+ ♔h7 36 ♘xf7 ♔g8 37 ♘e5 is also very strong.



It is often stated that queen and knight form an especially effective combination. One should not take this as a general principle and indeed in open positions a queen and bishop often prove superior to a queen and knight. However, it is true that a queen and knight are extremely dangerous when conducting a direct attack on the enemy king. In this case the ability of the knight to target squares of either colour gives the attacker great flexibility.

34...f5

If 34...♖8c2+, then 35 ♔e3 ♖e1+ 36 ♔d3 brings the checks to an end.

35 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 36 ♕g6+ ♔f8 37 ♘e5 ♖1c7

White's king now has an escape-route via f4 in case of, for example, 37...♖8c2+ 38 ♔e3 ♖e1+ 39 ♔f4.

38 ♕f6+ ♔e8

Or 38...♔g8 39 ♘g6, followed by ♘e7+, gaining material.

39 ♔e3 ♖d8 40 h4 1-0

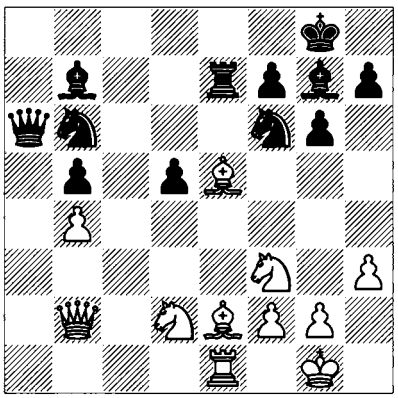
Black is essentially paralysed and cannot combat the advance of the h-pawn.

6 Queen vs Three Minor Pieces

A queen is worth nine pawns, the same as three minor pieces, but this equality is deceptive. In a large majority of middlegame positions, three minor pieces are worth more than a queen. In an endgame the queen starts to assert its power and is often at least a match for the pieces.

In the middlegame, the pieces are at their best in a direct attack on the enemy king. In other situations, the pieces prefer a quiet position in which they can manoeuvre to target enemy pawns or other weaknesses. If the side with the queen has no active counterplay, the pieces can often pick off enemy pawns one by one.

W



Nayer – Avrukh
Netanya (rapid) 2009

In this roughly equal position, Black's extra pawn is balanced by White's pressure on the long diagonal. White now decided to give up his queen for three minor pieces. Objectively speaking, this doesn't give him any advantage, but it forces Black to play accurately.

27 ♗xf6!? ♘a4 28 ♗xg7 ♘xb2 29 ♗xb2

If White can stabilize the position and blockade the d4-square then he will have the advantage. Eventually he will train his pieces on the weak b5-pawn, win it and make a passed pawn.

29...♕a4

The best chance. Black uses his queen to disturb White's coordination.

30 ♗c3 ♕a3?

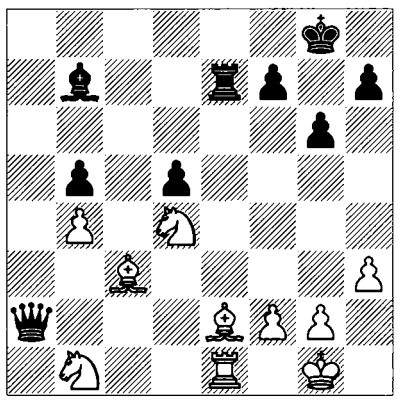
Although this causes White some temporary inconvenience, it allows White to reorganize his forces and restore his coordination. 30...♕c2! 31 ♗d4 ♗c6 32 ♗e3 (otherwise White cannot free his rook) 32...♗d7 is better, defending the b5-pawn and allowing the bishop to become active at f5. Then Black maintains the balance since the obvious 33 ♘d4? is bad due to 33...♕c3, attacking the b4-pawn and threatening 34...♖xe3.

31 ♘b1!

A surprisingly effective move. White intends ♘d4, freeing his rook, and then ♖d1, after which the b5-pawn will already be in danger.

31...♕a2 32 ♘d4

B



32...f6

This doesn't obstruct White, but even the more tenacious 32...♖e4, which prevents 33 ♘d2 due to 33...♖xd4, shouldn't make much difference in the long run since 33 ♔f1 followed by ♖d1 and ♗d3 frees White's pieces in any case.

33 ♘d2 ♕a8 34 ♘2b3

Now the rook will move to a1, unpinning the e2-bishop with gain of tempo.

34...♗c8 35 ♖a1 ♖a7 36 ♖c1

White doesn't want to exchange rooks, since queens are more effective in simplified positions.

36...♖a3

Black cannot save his b5-pawn.

37 ♗xb5

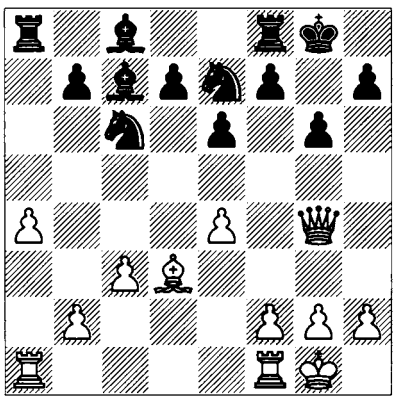
The game is over; Black has no effective counterplay and will be unable to combat the advance of White's b-pawn.

37...♗f5 38 ♗c6 ♕d8 39 ♘c5 ♗e4 40 b5 ♕b6 41 ♘d7 ♕a7 42 b6 1-0

The pieces don't always get their way. Even in the middlegame, they need open lines (in the case of bishops) and stable squares (in the case of knights) to develop real power. If there are many pawns on the board, the queen can sometimes hem the pieces in behind a pawn wall.

Vorobiov – Beshukov
Russian Ch, Krasnodar 2002

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6 5 ♘c3 ♕c7 6 ♘db5 ♕b8 7 ♗e3 a6 8 ♗b6 axb5 9 ♘xb5 ♗b4+ 10 c3 ♗a5 11 ♘c7+ ♕xc7 12 ♗xc7 ♗xc7 13 ♕g4 g6 14 ♗d3 ♘ge7 15 0-0 0-0 16 a4!



The material balance of queen vs three minor pieces has arisen as a result of a sharp opening line. Black's problem here is the large number of pawns on the board, which makes it hard for his minor pieces to develop activity. White can advance his pawns to deny Black's knights any decent squares, giving White time to improve his position on the queenside.

16...d6?!

A passive move which leaves Black's minor pieces stuck on the first three ranks. 16...d5 is better, fighting for space before White's queenside pawns have advanced too far.

17 ♕e2 ♗d7

17...♘e5 only wastes time if White replies 18 ♗b5 followed by f4.

18 b4 ♖fc8 19 a5 d5

Finally Black takes action in the centre, but he has lost considerable time and allowed White's pawns to advance menacingly.

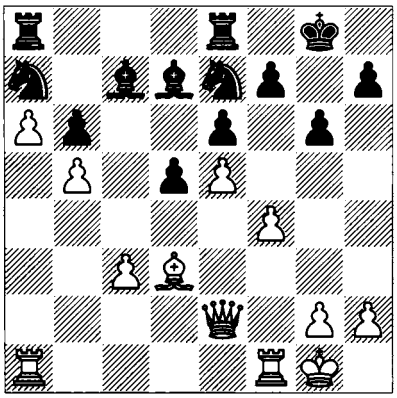
20 a6 b6?

It is wrong to let White's pawn remain on a6. Although the pawn can be blockaded, it presents a permanent danger which ties Black's pieces down. 20...bxa6 21 ♗xa6 ♖d8 is better, but after 22 g3! (keeping Black's knight out of f4 after an exchange on d5) White retains some advantage.

21 f4! ♖e8

21...dxe4 22 ♗xe4 ♖a7 23 ♖ad1 is also very bad for Black.

22 e5 ♘a7 23 b5



Completely sealing in Black's minor pieces and giving White a decisive advantage. Now he only has to break open the centre by c4.

23...♗d8 24 ♖ac1 ♖c8 25 c4 dxc4 26 ♖xc4!

The most dynamic method. White gives up a pawn but penetrates with his queen.

26...♗xb5

26...♖xc4 27 ♗xc4 followed by ♖d1 is also hopeless for Black.

27 ♖xc8 ♗xd3 28 ♕xd3 ♘exc8

28...♘axc8 29 ♕b5 ♖f8 30 ♖c1 leaves Black totally paralysed.

29 ♕d7 ♖f8 30 g4!

With Black's forces totally committed to holding back the a-pawn, White strikes the decisive blow on the kingside.

30...b5

30...♗e7 loses to 31 f5 ♖d8 32 ♕c7.

31 f5 ♗b6+ 32 ♔h1 exf5

32...♖d8 33 ♕b7 is also a win for White.

33 gxf5 g5 34 f6

Black's king is defenceless.

34...♖d8 35 ♕f5 h6 36 e6 ♖f8 37 e7 1-0

7 Queen vs Two Minor Pieces

Giving up your queen for two minor pieces represents a very significant sacrifice, more or less equivalent to a whole piece. Such a sacrifice can only be justified if the compensation is substantial, such as a strong attack against the king, a killer passed pawn or a massive positional advantage.

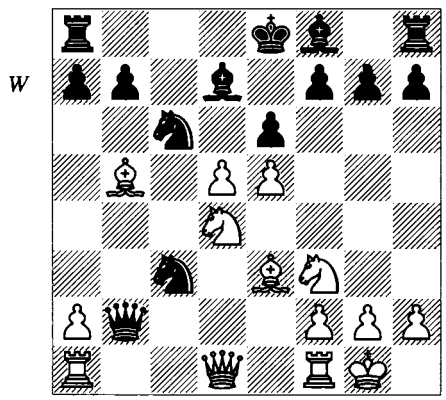
Svetushkin – Landa
European Ch, Rijeka 2010

1 e4 c6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘e4 5 ♘e2 ♕b6?! 6 d4 c5 7 dxc5 ♕xc5 8 ♘ed4 ♘c6 9 ♗b5 ♗d7 10 0-0 e6 11 ♗e3 ♕b4 12 c4!

A dubious opening line by Black has given White a dangerous initiative. This vigorous move aims to open lines for a direct attack on Black's king.

12...♕xb2 13 cxd5 ♘c3

After 13...exd5 14 ♖b1 ♕xa2 15 e6! fxe6 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 (16...♗xc6 17 ♘e5 is no improvement for Black) 17 ♘e5 Black is helpless against the many threats, such as 18 ♕h5+, 18 ♕f3 and 18 ♘xd7 ♔xd7 19 ♕g4.



This is the key moment. White now correctly decides to sacrifice his queen for a bishop and knight. In return, White will obtain a large lead in development and trap Black's king in the centre of the board. It is important to note that White's compensation is essentially positional but, despite the lack of immediate threats, Black is unable to protect himself from the gathering storm. Note that 14 dxc6?! is met by 14...bxc6.

14 dxe6! ♘xd1 15 exd7+ ♔d8

Or 15...♔xd7 16 ♖fxd1 ♔c7 17 ♖dc1 ♕a3 18 ♖b3 ♕a5 19 ♖c1, crashing through on c6.

16 ♖axd1 ♘xd4 17 ♘xd4

White's threats include 18 ♖d2 ♕a3 19 ♖c2 a6 (or else ♖fc1) 20 ♘e6+! fxe6 21 ♗b6+ ♔e7 22 ♖c8.

17...♗c5 18 ♗c4!

Planning to take on f7, followed by either e6 or ♘e6+.

18...♗xd4

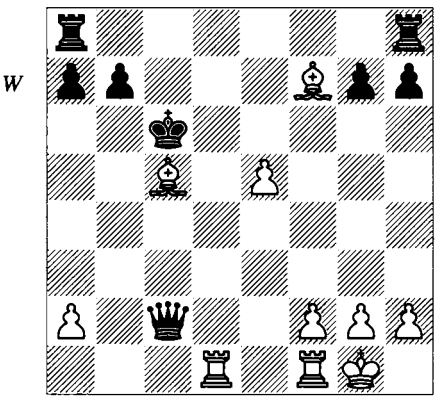
18...♖f8 fails to 19 ♘c6+ bxc6 20 ♗xc5 ♖h8 21 ♗d6!, followed by ♗xf7 and e6.

19 ♗xd4 ♕c2 20 ♗xf7 ♔xd7

Black must take the pawn, since otherwise e6 will be fatal.

21 ♗c5+! ♔c6

Or 21...♔c7 22 ♖c1 ♕a4 23 ♖fd1 with a decisive attack.



22 ♗e3 ♔b5

White also wins after 22...♕a4 23 ♖d6+ ♔c7 24 ♖d4 ♕a5 25 ♖c1+ ♔b8 26 e6 a6 27 e7.

23 ♖b1+ ♔a6 24 ♖fc1 ♕a4 25 ♖c4!

25 ♗c4+? b5 lets Black escape.

25...♕a3 26 ♗c1 ♕a5

26...♕xa2 is met by 27 ♖c6+.

27 ♗d2 ♕a3

Or 27...♕xd2 28 ♖a4+ ♕a5 29 ♗c4+ b5 30 ♗xb5+ ♔b6 31 ♗e2+ and White wins.

28 ♖c3 ♕a5 29 ♗c4+ b5 30 ♗xb5+ ♕xb5 31 ♖a3+ ♔b6 32 ♗e3+ 1-0

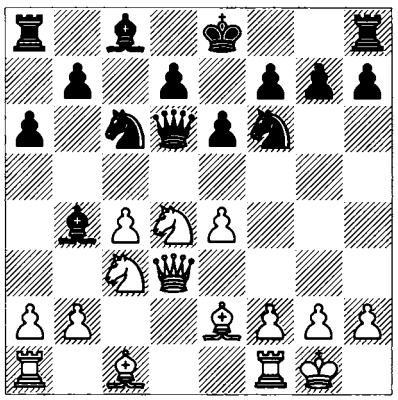
After 32...♔c6 33 ♖c3+ White will end up a piece ahead.

It's important to emphasize that sacrificing a queen for two minor pieces is a considerable commitment and the compensation should be really major. A bit of pressure and a few isolated threats aren't enough.

Al Modiahki – Kveinys
Reykjavik 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c4 ♘c6 4 ♘c3 ♘f6 5 ♗e2 ♕c7 6 0-0 a6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗b4 9 ♕d3 ♕d6?!

9...0-0 is normal, but Black's provocative move persuades White to give up his queen.



10 ♘xc6 ♕xd3 11 ♘xb4?

White's optimism gets the better of him. Simply 11 ♗xd3 dxc6 (11...bxc6 12 e5 ♘g4 13 ♗f4 f6 14 exf6 ♘xf6 15 ♘a4 also favours White) 12 e5 ♘d7 13 ♗f4 gives White a modest endgame advantage.

11...♕d6 12 ♘d3

At first sight White's pressure looks considerable. He is well ahead in development, threatens 13 e5, and in a line such as 12...♕c7 13 e5 ♘g8 14 ♘e4 ♘e7 15 ♘d6+ ♔f8 16 c5 he develops a very dangerous initiative. Black has to come up with a good defensive plan. He does this by focusing on the weakest aspect of his position, namely his lack of dark-squared control, and taking action to correct it.

12...e5!

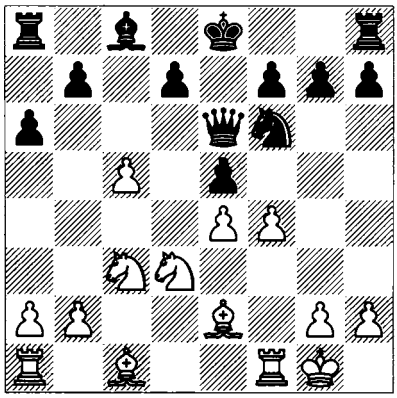
This meets the threat of e5 and at the same time prevents White from increasing his dark-squared grip.

13 c5

After 13 f4 ♕d4+ 14 ♔h1 d6 Black puts another pawn on a dark square, and it isn't easy to exploit the exposed black queen.

13...♕e6 14 f4

When you are well ahead in material, you always have the option of returning some of it to neutralize the enemy initiative. This can occur, for example, in the line 14 ♘b4 d6 15 ♘bd5 ♘xd5 16 ♘xd5 ♕g6 17 ♘c7+ ♔e7 18 ♘xa8 ♗h3 19 cxd6+ ♔xd6 20 ♗f3 ♖xa8, when Black still has a queen for rook and piece, and is no longer behind in development.



14...d6 15 f5

After 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 ♗g5 ♕c6 17 ♗xf6 gxf6 18 ♘d5 ♗e6 19 ♘xf6+ ♔e7 20 ♖ac1 ♕a4 Black consolidates.

15...♕d7 16 ♗g5

16 ♗e3 dxc5 17 ♘xc5 ♕e7 is safe for Black.

16...dxc5?

Giving White a chance. 16...♕c6! would have kept a lid on White's activity.

17 ♖fd1?

17 ♖ad1! is a better try, as 17...♕c7 18 ♘xe5! ♕xe5 (18...0-0 19 ♗xf6 gxf6 20 ♘g4 is also unclear) 19 ♗f4 ♕e7 20 ♗d6 ♕d8 21 e5 gives White sufficient compensation.

17...♕c7 18 ♗xf6 gxf6 19 ♘d5

White at last gets a knight to d5, but it is too late. By now his initiative is on the wane and he can do nothing to prevent Black from completing his development.

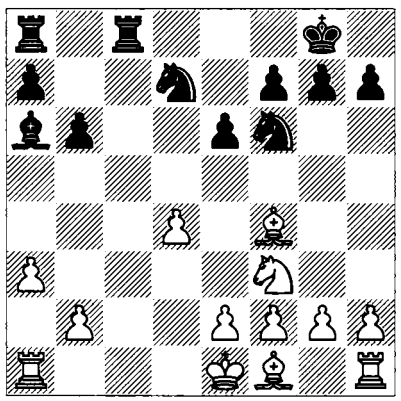
19...♕d6 20 b4 c4 21 ♘f2 0-0 22 ♘g4 ♔h8 23 ♗xc4 b5 24 ♗b3 ♗b7 25 ♘gxf6 ♖ac8 26 h3 ♗xd5 27 ♘xd5 ♕h6 28 a4 ♖g8 29 ♔h2 ♕h4 30 ♘e3 ♕xe4 31 ♘g4 h5 0-1

8 Playing with an Extra Pawn

Handling positions with an extra pawn is not easy, because in some cases it's better to hang on to the extra material while in others it's a good idea to return it in order to take over the initiative. Here I shall give one example of each case, but it's worth recognizing that even grandmasters have trouble with this type of decision. The best advice is to be aware of both possibilities and to remain flexible.

Carlsen – Adams
World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 d5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 ♕xc3 dxc4 7 ♕xc4 b6 8 ♗f4 ♗a6 9 ♕xc7 ♕xc7 10 ♗xc7 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♖c8 12 ♗f4 ♘bd7



Black has sacrificed a pawn, and in return he has both a considerable lead in development and possibilities to penetrate with his rook to c2.

13 ♘d2!?

It isn't easy for White to continue with his development; for example, 13 e3 ♗xf1 14 ♖xf1 ♖c2 15 ♖b1 ♖ac8 gives Black good play since the c2-rook cannot be expelled. Recognizing that the key to Black's compensation is the weakness of the c2-square, Carlsen decides to control this square by playing his knight to a1! This plan involves putting White's development on hold, but Adams is not able to exploit this. In this example, hanging on to the pawn takes precedence over piece activity, but careful calculation is necessary before embarking on such a plan.

13...♖c2 14 ♖b1 ♖ac8 15 ♘b3! ♗c4 16 ♘a1! ♗a2 17 ♘xc2 ♗xb1 18 ♘a1

Remarkably, Black has nothing for the pawn and cannot prevent White from playing ♗d2 and e3 to free his kingside pieces.

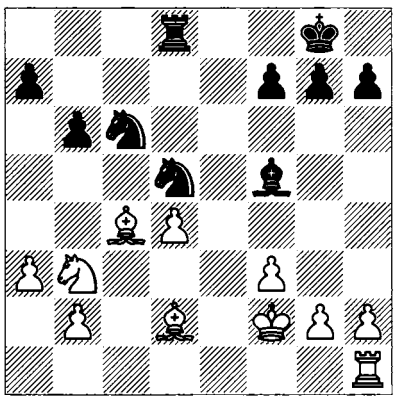
18...♘d5 19 ♗d2 e5 20 e3!

Stronger than 20 dxe5 ♘xe5 21 e3 ♗d3, when Black has counterplay.

20...exd4 21 exd4 ♘b8

Black seeks to attack the d4-pawn, but this doesn't trouble White.

22 f3 ♘c6 23 ♗c4 ♖d8 24 ♔f2 ♗f5 25 ♘b3



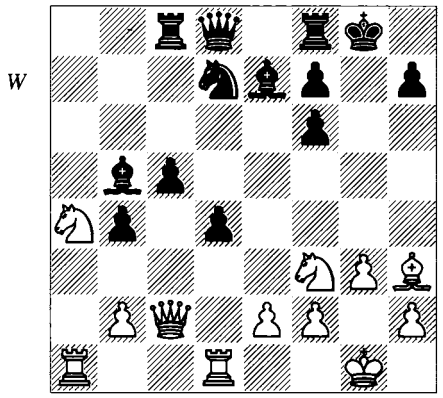
The position has become 'normal' and White still has his extra pawn. Although the isolated d-pawn introduces some technical problems, the fact that White also has the two bishops should make his task easier.

25...♗e6 26 ♖c1 f6 27 a4! a5

If White is allowed to play a5 then he will be able to open the a-file for his rook, so Adams prevents the further advance of the pawn. However, this leaves the b6-pawn weak.

28 ♗c3 ♗f7 29 ♘d2 ♘de7

Now White can simply defend the d-pawn by 30 ♖d1! since 30...♘xd4?! 31 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 32 ♘c4 ♘ec6 33 ♘xb6 is winning for White. In this case White has a safe extra pawn. However, Carlsen played **30 ♗f1?! ♘xd4 31 ♖e1 ♘dc6 32 ♘c4**, giving up the d-pawn and retaining only a slight advantage thanks to his two bishops. White won after a long struggle (1-0, 77).



Carlsen – Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 2010

Black has an extra pawn, but White has more than sufficient compensation for it since his pieces are active and Black's kingside pawn-structure is shattered. White can easily improve his position with 21 b3 followed by ♘b2-c4, blockading Black's pawns and leaving him in an awkward position. Instead, White played to improve his position with gain of tempo but failed to take into account the possibility that Black would return the extra pawn.

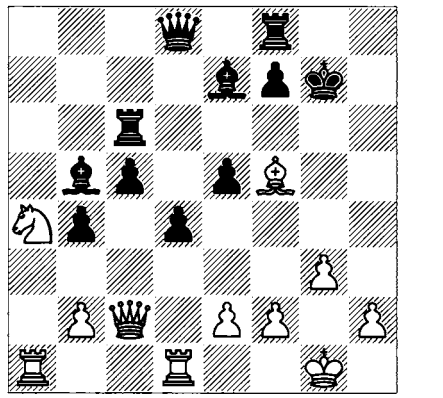
21 ♗f5?! ♘e5!

Although there are many complications to come, this is a key moment. Keeping the pawn by 21...h6 allows White an even more favourable version of the above line after 22 b3, since here his bishop is already on the active f5-square. Instead, Black recognized that in this unbalanced position it is not so much material which is important but piece activity. The move played is strong not only for objective reasons but also for psychological ones. Instead of simply playing positionally, White now faces the tricky decision of whether to take the h7-pawn, the c8-rook or nothing at all.

22 ♗xh7+?!

22 b3 d3 23 ♕c1 dxe2 24 ♖xd8 ♘xf3+ 25 ♔g2 e1♘+ and 22 ♗xc8 d3 are complicated but ultimately favour Black, so perhaps 22 ♘xe5 fxe5 23 b3 is best. Then the light-square blockade compensates for the extra pawn although Black's chances are clearly better than in the original diagram position since his pawns are no longer doubled.

22...♔g7 23 ♘xe5 fxe5 24 ♗f5 ♖c6



By returning the pawn, Black has activated his pieces and improved his pawn-structure. White no longer has time to slowly improve the position of his knight as Black is already threatening to start an attack by doubling rooks on the h-file; indeed, it is now White who must play for equality.

25 ♕e4 ♖h8!

Consistently playing for activity, Black offers another pawn. White may as well accept since 26 b3 ♖ch6 gives Black dangerous threats.

26 ♕xe5+ ♗f6 27 ♕e4 ♖e8 28 ♕g4+ ♔f8

White's only real hope is the exposed position of Black's king, but it proves surprisingly difficult to exploit this thanks to the f6-bishop, which performs well as a defender.

29 ♗e4 c4!

This sacrifice is another blow for White. Black offers the exchange to set his pawns in motion and create threats on the long diagonal.

30 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 31 ♕h5 ♖e5 32 ♕h6+ ♔e7?

32...♔g8! is very strong; for example, 33 ♕f4 ♕d5 34 f3 ♗g5 35 ♕g4 d3 with a raging initiative.

33 e4 d3 34 ♕e3 ♗xe4 35 ♘b6?

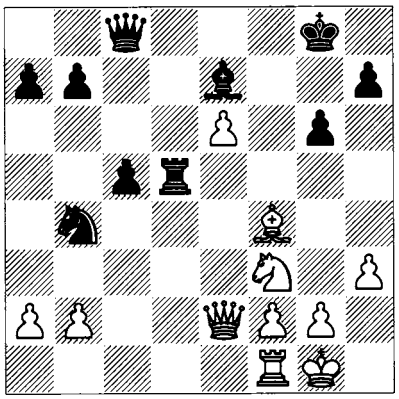
A blunder. 35 ♖e1 gives White good chances of saving the game, since the very complicated line 35...♗c6 36 ♕c5+ ♕d6 37 ♕xc4 d2 38 ♖ed1 ♖e4 39 ♕c5 ♖e2 40 ♔f1 ♕xc5 41 ♘xc5 ♗b5 42 ♔g2 ♗d4 43 ♘e4 ♗c6 44 ♔f1 ♖xe4 45 ♖xd2 is likely to lead to a draw. However, finding this defence over the board would be a near-impossible task.

35...♗b7

Now the knight falls.

36 ♕f4 ♕xb6 37 ♕xc4 ♖e2 38 ♖f1 0-1

9 Playing with a Pawn Less



Kramnik – L. Dominguez
Dresden Olympiad 2008

White is a clear pawn ahead and has a dangerous passed pawn on e6; in addition, Black's king is rather unsafe. Despite these disadvantages, it's essential not to give up hope. The first step in defending an inferior position is to see if there is any feature of the position that favours you. Here there is a glimmer of hope for Black, since he can establish his knight on d3 and support it by ...c4, when the knight controls squares such as c1 and e1, making it hard for White to activate his rook. Black also has a queenside pawn-majority, and it is in his favour to exchange queens. The passed e-pawn would then be less dangerous since it may be blockaded by the king. Moreover, Black's exposed king would no longer be a factor, while his queenside majority would provide good counterplay.

29...♘d3 30 ♗g3 c4?!

Although thematic, this is inferior due to a concealed tactical point. 30...♕c6 is better, since then 31 ♕e4 can be met by 31...♖d6!, when White must either retreat or exchange queens, which favours Black.

31 ♕e4

White plays correctly, centralizing his queen.

31...♕c6 32 ♘d4?

White had a chance to undermine the key d3-knight by 32 b3! based on the tactical points 32...b5? 33 ♘d4 ♕c5 34 ♘xb5 and 32...cxb3? 33 ♘d4 ♕c4 34 ♕f3, with ♕f7+ to come.

32...♕c5 33 ♘c2

Kramnik plans to transfer his knight to e3 to attack the c4-pawn.

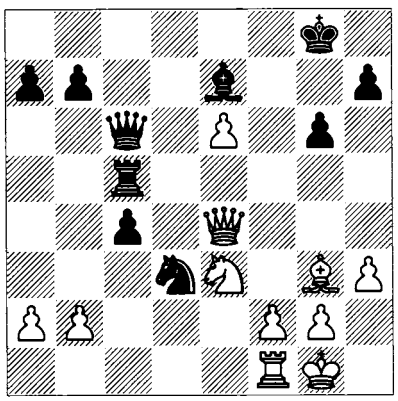
33...♕c6!

A good defence, preparing to offer the exchange of queens.

34 ♘e3?!

34 b3! is again more effective, although this time Black can fight on by 34...♘c5 35 ♕xc4 ♘xe6 36 ♕xc6 bxc6 followed by ...♖d2 with slight counterplay for the pawn.

34...♖c5



By now White has conceded a good part of his advantage.

35 ♕g4 b5 36 f4?

Playing to attack Black's king, but this not only gives away the last remnant of White's advantage, but even hands Black the initiative. 36 b3! is still correct.

36...♕e4! 37 ♕f3

White has no choice, since 37 ♘c2? ♖f5 costs him the e6-pawn, after which Black's active pieces and powerful knight give him a clear advantage.

37...♕xf3 38 ♖xf3 ♖c6!

38...♘xb2? is risky due to 39 f5.

39 f5 gxf5 40 ♘xf5 ♗c5+ 41 ♔h2 ♖xe6

Black has regained his pawn and now has some advantage.

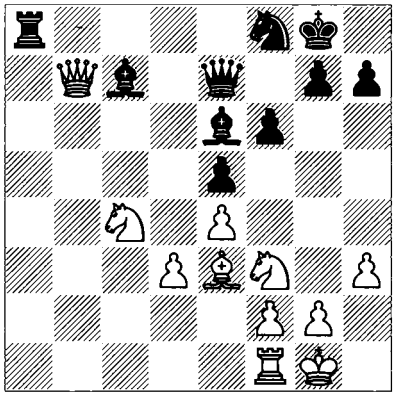
42 b3 h5 43 bxc4 bxc4 44 ♗c7 ♖e2?!

44...♖a6 is awkward for White.

45 ♗d6 ♗b6 ½-½

A draw was agreed even though Black remains slightly better.

B



Ivanchuk – Leko
Nalchik 2009

Black is a pawn down and once again he should ask what favours him in the position. He has the two bishops, but that is of little value as there are few open lines. Perhaps the main positive feature is that White's extra pawn is the backward d-pawn, which is difficult to put to any constructive use.

Unlike the previous example, Black has no real prospects of active play, so he must try to restrict White's advantage and obstruct any plan he might develop for exploiting the extra pawn. Such 'watchful waiting' tactics are often very effective in situations in which the player with the extra pawn has no obvious winning plan. The defender avoids weakening his position with panicky pawn moves, and simply keeps his position solid and flexible. The burden is then on the player with the extra material to find a plan that enhances his advantage.

25...♖d8 26 ♖c1 ♖d7

26...♖xd3?? loses to 27 ♘cxe5.

27 ♘e1 ♗a5!

It might appear strange to exchange one of the two bishops, but this was an excellent decision. Black's dark-squared bishop is inactive since it is largely blocked in by friendly pawns, and in addition the knight on e1 was performing the useful function of defending the d3-pawn, freeing White's other pieces to manoeuvre more actively. With this knight gone, White will always have a major piece tied to defending the d3-pawn. Finally, the opposite-coloured bishops give Black the hope of reaching a draw by liquidating all the other pieces.

28 ♕b1 ♗xe1 29 ♖xe1 ♕d8 30 ♗b6 ♕b8 31 ♕c2 ♘g6 32 ♖a1 h6!

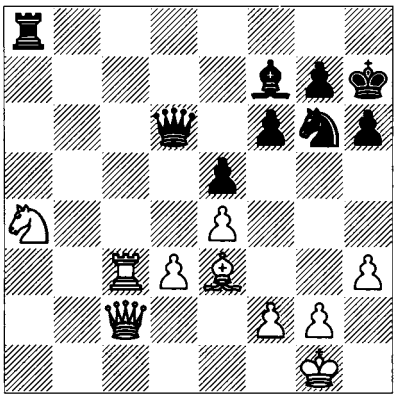
At the moment White is not threatening anything, so Black takes the chance to tuck his king away safely on h7. Such small improvements in one's position may not have any immediate impact, but in the long run they often prove useful. They are typical of 'watchful waiting' defence.

33 ♗e3 ♔h7 34 ♘b6 ♖d8 35 ♖a3 ♕d6

Black keeps d4 firmly under control to prevent White from liquidating his backward pawn by advancing it.

36 ♖c3 ♗f7 37 ♘a4 ♖a8

W



White has not found any way to improve his position by normal manoeuvring and decides to give Black the chance to alter the material balance.

38 ♖c7 ♗b3 39 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 40 ♕xb3

The liquidation has left White with two pawns for the exchange, but he has no passed pawns so Black shouldn't have any trouble drawing. If White could get his knight to f5, then Black would be in trouble, but this is impossible.

40...♖b8 41 ♕c4 ♘f4 42 ♘c5

42 ♗xf4 ♖b1+ 43 ♔h2 exf4 44 f3 ♖b4 45 ♕c2 h5 is also safe for Black.

42...♖c8 43 ♔h2 ♖c6

Preparing ...♘e6 to force a further liquidation.

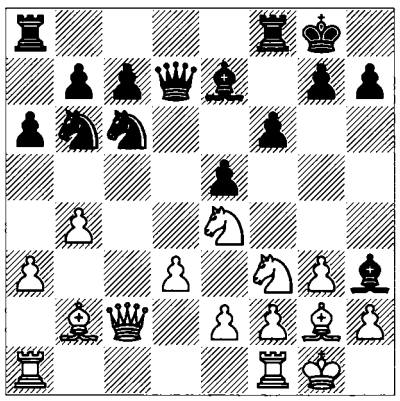
44 ♕b5 ♘e6 45 ♘xe6+ ♕xe6 46 f4 ♖d6

The danger is over and Black now draws comfortably.

47 ♗c5 ♕d7 48 ♕b8 ♖xd3 49 fxe5 fxe5 50 ♕xe5+ ♔h7 51 ♗b4 ♕g7 52 ♕f4 ♕g5 53 ♕b8 ♕g8 54 ♕f4 ♕g5 55 ♕b8 ½-½

10 Bishop vs Knight (1)

In general, a bishop is worth slightly more than a knight or, to put it another way, positions that favour bishops tend to arise more often than those which favour knights. Bishops like open positions, especially those in which the centre is free of pawns. Knights prefer blocked positions, especially those in which the centre is congested with pawns. However, these rules of thumb have many exceptions, some of which we shall see in the next section. The following example is a perfect demonstration of the bishop's traditional strengths.



Miles – Timman
Tilburg 1984

14 ♘c5

Black must take or he loses a pawn, so White secures the advantage of bishop against knight.

14...♗xc5 15 ♗xh3 ♕xh3 16 ♕b3+ ♔h8 17 bxc5 ♘d7 18 d4

18 ♕xb7? is bad due to 18...♕e6!, which leaves White's queen in trouble. Instead, White plays to swap pawns in the centre and increase the scope of his bishop on the long diagonal.

18...♖ab8

White was threatening 19 ♕xb7 ♕e6 20 ♕xc7, since Black no longer has ...♘xc5, so Black is forced to spend a tempo defending the b-pawn.

19 dxe5 ♘dxe5 20 ♘xe5 fxe5

20...♘xe5 21 ♗xe5 fxe5 22 ♖ad1 favours White because Black cannot oppose rooks on the d-file without losing his b-pawn.

21 ♖ad1 ♖f6

Threatening ...♖h6, but this move gives White the chance to blast away another obstruction on the long diagonal.

22 f4! ♖xf4 23 ♖xf4 exf4 24 ♕f7 ♖g8 25 ♖f1!

A neat point. 25...fxg3? loses to 26 ♕xg7+ ♖xg7 27 ♖f8#, so White is able to take back with his rook on f4, thereby maintaining his queen in its current active position.

25...♕g4 26 ♖xf4 ♕g5

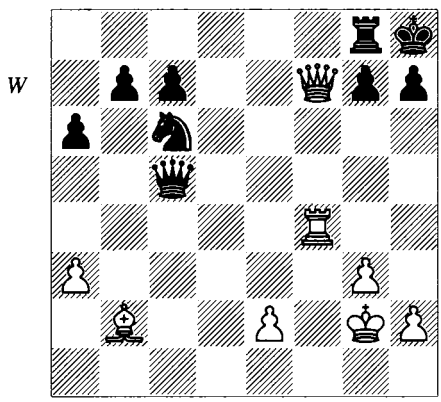
White's bishop is now exerting its maximum power, but the game still has to be won.

27 ♔g2?!

This sets a neat trap into which Black falls, but 27 ♖e4! is more accurate. Then 27...♕xc5+? 28 ♔g2 transposes to the game, while even after the best defence, 27...h6 28 ♔g2 ♔h7 29 ♗c3 ♕g6 30 ♕c4, White retains awkward pressure.

27...♕xc5?

Black should play 27...♘d8! 28 ♕c4 (28 ♕xc7?? ♘e6) 28...♕e7, relieving the pressure and bringing the knight closer to the kingside.



28 ♖e4!

Suddenly White has a decisive attack. The immediate threats are 29 ♖e8 and 29 ♕xg7+ ♖xg7 30 ♖e8+ followed by mate next move.

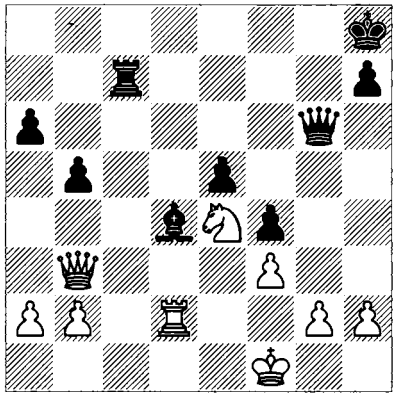
28...♕f8 29 ♕h5 ♘e7

Black aims to meet 30 ♖h4 by 30...♕f5, but one final finesse overloads Black's defences.

30 ♕g5! ♘g6

30...♘c6 loses to 31 ♖h4 (threatening 32 ♖xh7+) 31...♕f7 32 ♕h6 ♕f5 33 e4.

31 ♕xg6 1-0



Anand – Radjabov
Linares 2009

At first glance Black's position appears entirely satisfactory. White's knight is well placed on e4, but Black's bishop also occupies an active position. However, this example illustrates an important point: a piece is only effectively posted if it can actually do something. The d4-bishop looks good, but in a simplified position it is striking into thin air. Moreover, its mobility is restricted by the e5-pawn. The knight is more manoeuvrable and is better able to create threats. Much is often made of the supposed superiority of queen and knight against queen and bishop. This is often exaggerated, but here is a case in which the principle has some validity.

34 ♖c2 ♖c6 35 ♕d3 ♔g7 36 b3

White removes the bishop's potential targets.

36...h6 37 g4!

Giving Black an awkward choice. If he ignores this pawn, White secures a kingside majority, but if he exchanges on g3 White gains the option of an eventual g4 and ♘g3-f5.

37...fxg3

After 37...♕e6 38 h4 ♕d7 (38...♕c8? allows an immediate knight transfer by 39 ♘d6) 39 h5 Black already has to be careful; for example, 39...♕c7?? loses to 40 ♘g5! hxg5 41 ♕g6+ ♖xg6 42 ♖xc7+, winning the exchange.

38 hxg3 ♕e6 39 ♔g2 ♕c8 40 ♖xc6 ♕xc6 41 ♕d2

Now Black cannot penetrate with his queen and it becomes clear that he is unable to improve his position. The bishop, although apparently active, cannot move anywhere else useful.

41...♕e6

If Black tries to prevent g4 by 41...h5 then 42 ♕g5+ ♕g6 43 ♕e7+ ♕f7 44 ♕d8 followed by ♘d6 is very awkward for Black.

42 g4

Now the possibility of ♘g3-f5 becomes a reality.

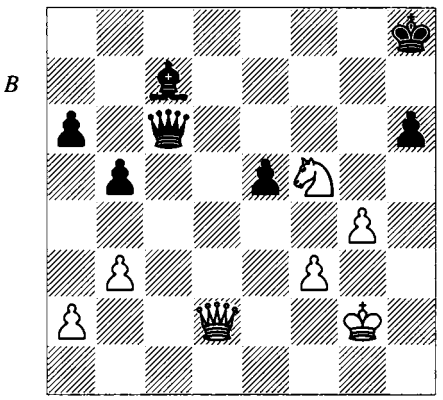
42...♕c6 43 ♘g3 ♔h7 44 ♘f5 ♗b6

Threatening ...e4, but this is easy to counter.

45 ♕d3 ♔h8 46 ♕e2 ♗c7

46...♗d4 47 ♘xd4 exd4 48 ♕e5+ ♔g8 49 ♕xd4 ♕c2+ 50 ♕f2 gives White a clear extra pawn, so the bishop must defend the e5-pawn from a more passive square.

47 ♕d2



47...♔h7 48 ♘e7

The mobility of the knight again causes problems for Black.

48...♕c5?

48...♕d6 49 ♕c2+ e4 50 ♕xe4+ ♔h8 was the last chance, hoping for some counterplay along the b8-h2 diagonal, but after 51 ♕e3 ♕h2+ 52 ♔f1 White should still win in the end.

49 ♕d3+ ♔h8 50 ♕d7

The queen and knight cooperate to create a decisive attack.

50...e4 51 ♕e8+

The computer sequence 51 ♔h3! exf3 52 ♕e8+ ♔g7 53 b4! wins more quickly.

51...♔g7 52 ♘f5+ ♔f6 53 ♕xe4

Winning a pawn while maintaining White's other advantages. Black is lost.

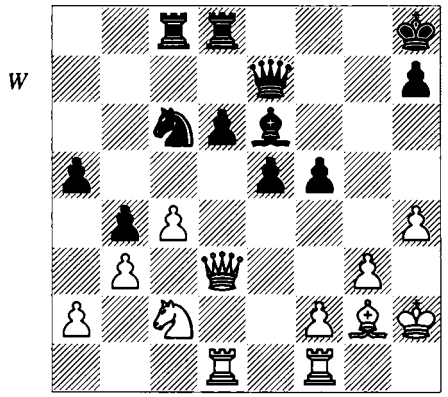
53...♗b6 54 ♔h3 h5 55 g5+! ♔xg5 56 ♘e7

Threatening 47 ♕h4+ ♔h6 48 ♕f6+, mating.

56...♔f6 57 ♘d5+ ♔g7 58 ♕e5+ ♔h6 59 ♕f6+ ♔h7 60 ♕f7+ ♔h6 61 ♘e7 1-0

11 Bishop vs Knight (2)

Although the general rules regarding bishops and knights apply in the majority of positions, there are many exceptions and, as always, the requirements of specific positions override general principles.



Nisipeanu – Radjabov
Medias 2010

White has a slight theoretical advantage in pawn-structure since Black's d-pawn is backward, but converting this into something tangible is not easy in view of Black's piece activity. White has to worry about ideas such as ...e4 followed by ...♘e5, moving the knight over to exploit White's slightly weakened kingside, or just ...f4, keeping White's knight out of e3 while opening a line for Black's bishop. Exploiting advantages is very often a matter of eliminating counterplay, and well-considered piece exchanges can be an enormous help.

23 ♗xc6!

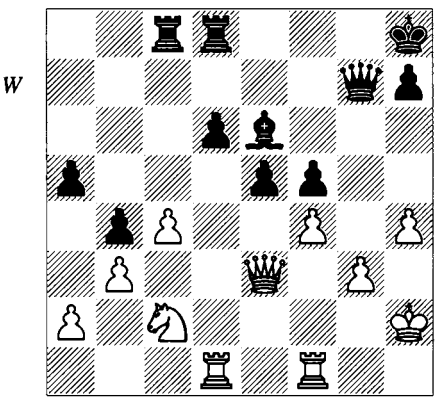
It is counter-intuitive to give up one's fianchettoed bishop for a knight, especially if it doesn't result in doubled pawns, but here it provides the perfect solution for White. The possibilities of Black developing active play by ...♘d4 or ...e4 and ...♘e5 are eliminated, and White gains time to step up the pressure. After 23 ♘e3?! f4 24 ♘d5 ♕g7, followed by ...♖g8, by contrast, Black has good counterplay.

23...♖xc6 24 f4

The key move, preventing ...f4. Now White can transfer his knight to e3 and d5 without Black's knight occupying d4. If Black could get his bishop to e4 then White would regret exchanging off his bishop, but Black will have no time for this since all his efforts have to go into resisting White's pressure against his central pawns.

24...♖cc8 25 ♕e3 ♕g7

25...e4 26 ♕b6 ♕c7 27 ♕d4+ ♕g7 28 ♖f2 leads to a very unfavourable ending for Black in which his bishop has limited scope while White's knight has a perfect square on e3.



26 ♖f2 ♖d7?!

Black was under severe pressure in any case, but this leads to a rapid collapse. 26...d5 is the only chance; after 27 ♖fd2 (27 cxd5 ♖c3 28 ♕xe5 ♕xe5 29 fxe5 f4! 30 gxf4 ♖h3+ 31 ♔g1 ♗xd5 and 27 fxe5 dxc4 28 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 29 bxc4 ♖d1 both give Black counterplay at the cost of a pawn) 27...♖e8 28 cxd5 ♗xd5 29 ♘xb4 ♗xb3 30 ♕xb3 axb4 31 ♕xb4 ♖g8 32 ♖g2 White is a pawn up, but converting this into a win requires some work.

27 ♘d4!

Now the knight finds an even more effective route. There are immediate attacks against e6 and f5, while after ♘b5 the d6-pawn comes under fire. Black is lost.

27...♕g4 28 ♖dd2 ♖e8 29 ♘b5

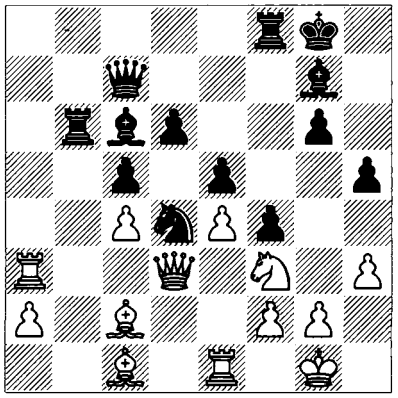
Winning material.

29...d5 30 ♘d6! ♖ed8

30...♖xd6 loses to 31 ♕xe5+.

31 ♕xe5+ ♕g7 32 c5 ♕xe5 33 fxe5 ♖c7 34 ♖c2 d4 35 ♖fd2 f4 36 gxf4 d3 37 ♖xd3 ♗f5 38 ♘f7+ ♔g7 39 ♖g2+ 1-0

B



Finocchiario – Van Oosterom
World Corr. Ch 1996-2001

Black has a definite advantage since White has two isolated pawns on the queenside, while Black's pawn-structure is marred only by the backward pawn on d6. However, it is important to note that the d6-pawn is not weak in itself, since White has no way to attack it; rather the pawn has no mobility, and so has less value than a healthy pawn. If White could get his knight to d5 then everything would change, but the knight is currently far from this square and has no real prospects of getting there. One might be tempted to list the dominant d4-knight as one of Black's advantages, but just see what happens next.

30...♘xc2!

At first sight this exchange looks insane, as it swaps Black's most active minor piece for White's theoretically bad bishop. However, by preventing the exchange on d4, Black stabilizes the position and effectively kills any possible white counterplay. By attacking the c4-pawn, Black will be able to prevent White's knight from reaching d5, while Black's pawn-chain so restricts White's remaining bishop that it hardly counts as a good bishop. With White's counterplay snuffed out, Black can turn to the exploitation of his advantage by pushing his kingside pawns. If instead 30...♕d7, for example, then 31 ♘xd4 cxd4 (31...exd4 32 e5 is unclear) 32 ♖b3 ♖b7 33 ♖xb7 ♗xb7 34 ♗a3, with c5 to come, provides White with some counterplay. Note how the exchange on d4 loosens up the pawn-structure and gives White possibilities of playing c5 or e5, which disturbs Black from the calm exploitation of his advantage.

31 ♕xc2 ♖fb8 32 ♕d3 ♗f8 33 ♖b3 ♕b7 34 ♘d2

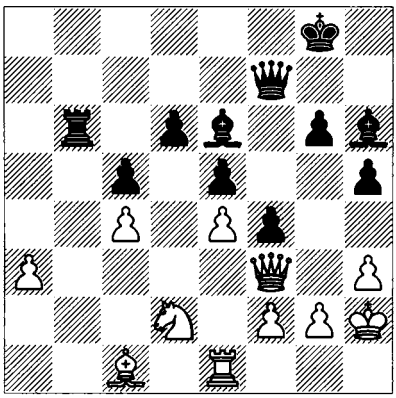
34 ♖xb6 ♕xb6 35 ♘h4 ♗e8 followed by ...♗e7 expels the knight.

34...♖a8 35 ♕b1 ♖aa6 36 ♖xb6 ♖xb6 37 ♕d3 ♖a6 38 a3

38 ♕c2 ♗d7 39 ♘b1 ♗e6 attacks c4 and so prevents ♘c3-d5.

38...♖b6 39 ♕e2 ♗d7 40 ♔h2 ♗e6 41 ♕d1 ♗h6 42 ♕f3 ♕f7

W



With c4 under double attack, White's knight is tied to d2, paralysing both his minor pieces.

43 ♕c3 g5 44 ♖h1 ♔h7

44...g4 45 hxg4 hxg4 46 ♔g1 gives White a little activity, so Black improves his position before playing ...g4.

45 ♔g1 ♔g6 46 ♕d3 ♕d7 47 ♕c2 ♗f8 48 ♔h2 ♗e7 49 ♗b2 ♖a6 50 ♖a1 ♕a4 51 ♕d3 g4 52 ♖c1 ♖b6 53 ♗c3 ♔f7

The king moves to e7 to free the dark-squared bishop from the defence of d6.

54 ♖a1 ♗g5 55 ♔g1 ♔e7 56 ♔h1 ♖b8 57 ♖g1 ♗h4 58 ♖f1 gxh3 59 gxh3

59 g3 ♗g5 is also winning for Black.

59...♕a6

Heading to c8 to round up the h3-pawn.

60 a4 ♖g8 61 a5 ♕c8 62 ♔h2 ♖g7 63 ♖g1

63 a6 ♗g3+ 64 ♔g1 ♕g8! is winning for Black.

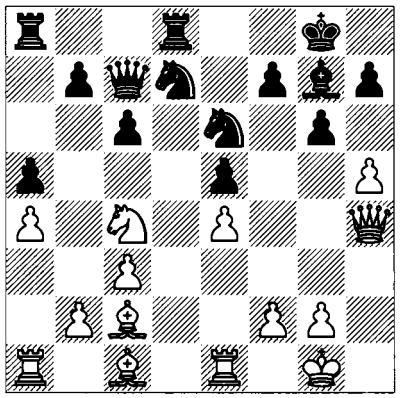
63...♖xg1 64 ♔xg1 ♗xh3

Winning a pawn without in any way relieving the pressure.

65 ♕f3 ♕g8+ 66 ♔h2 ♗c8 67 ♕g2 ♕xg2+ 68 ♔xg2 ♗a6 69 ♘f3 ♗f6 70 ♘d2 ♔d7 71 ♔f3 ♔c6 72 ♔e2 ♔b7 73 ♔d3 ♔a7 0-1

12 The Two Bishops

It is well-known that two bishops are better than a bishop and a knight in open positions. However, the same is true in many semi-open positions.



Movsesian – Gashimov
Spanish Team Ch, Sabadell 2008

White is better here thanks to his two bishops and the fact that Black's bishop is restricted by the e5-pawn. The main problem for the knights is their lack of active squares.

20 g3

Preventing a knight from moving to f4. Now only c5 is available as a more active square for the knights, but from here a knight can only hope to move to d3, and White can always cope with this single active possibility. The strength of the two bishops often lies in their potential rather than their current power. As pawns are exchanged and lines are opened, their influence can only increase. Here the c2-bishop doesn't appear very active, but it performs a useful function in keeping Black's knights out and thereby eliminating counterplay. Later it may have active possibilities itself on the a2-g8 diagonal.

20...♗f6 21 ♕h3 ♘dc5 22 hxg6 hxg6 23 ♗h6!

White avoids the exchange of a bishop by ...♘d3. After 23 ♔g2? ♘d3 24 ♗xd3 ♖xd3 25 ♖h1 ♖ad8 Black's problems are reduced, as the attack along the h-file is not by itself dangerous.

23...♕e7

Now 23...♘d3 is met by 24 ♖ed1, when the knight must retreat.

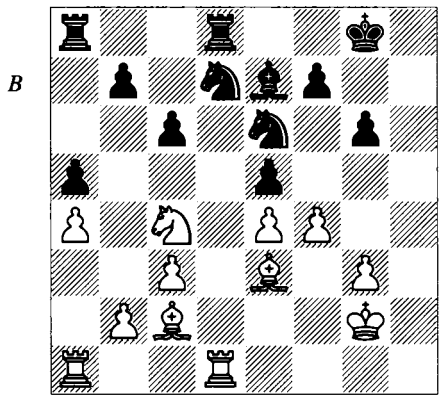
24 ♔g2 ♘g5 25 ♕g4 ♕e6 26 ♕xe6 ♘gxe6 27 ♗e3

Black's problems are not solved by the exchange of queens, since his pieces remain tied to the defence of the pawns attacked by White's knight.

27...♘d7

Freeing the bishop from the defence of the e5-pawn.

28 ♖ed1 ♗e7 29 f4



Stepping up the pressure.

29...♗c5

White can avoid the exchange of bishops.

30 f5 ♘ef8 31 ♗g5 f6 32 ♗h6

Threatening ♗b3, when Black's king will be caught in a deadly crossfire.

32...♔f7 33 ♗b3 ♔e7 34 ♖h1

The threat is 35 ♗xf8+ ♘xf8 36 fxg6 ♘xg6 37 ♖h7+.

34...g5 35 ♗g7 ♔e8

To meet ♖h6 with ...♗e7 in some lines, but the terrible pressure exerted by White's bishops is too much.

36 ♖ad1 ♔e7 37 ♔f3 b5 38 ♘e3 ♗xe3

Forced, or else ♘g4.

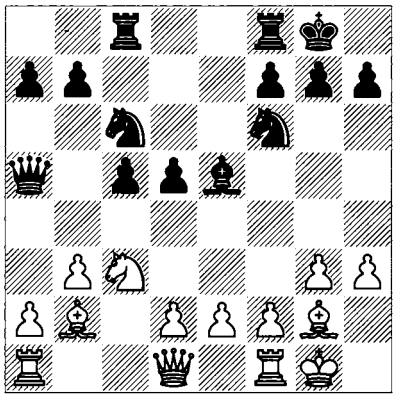
39 ♔xe3 ♘c5?! 40 ♗xf8+!

At last one of the bishops disappears, but it's too late for Black, since White has a forced win.

40...♔xf8

Or 40...♖xf8 41 ♖h7+ ♔e8 42 ♗e6.

41 ♖h8+ ♔e7 42 ♖h7+ ♔e8 43 ♖dh1 ♖d3+ 44 ♔e2 ♖ad8 45 ♖g7 ♖d2+ 46 ♔f3 ♖8d3+ 47 ♔g4 ♔f8 48 ♖g8+ 1-0



Gelfand – Elianov
Nalchik 2009

White has the two bishops, but it is Black who has pressure thanks to his active pieces and greater central control. A particular problem for White is that his queen lacks a good square.

14 ♖c1

With the cunning threat of 15 f4 ♗xc3 16 ♗xc3, since now 16...♕d8 loses a pawn after 17 ♗xf6 and 18 ♖xc5.

14...♕a6!

Black counters the threat since 15 f4 ♗xc3 16 ♗xc3 ♘e4 is very uncomfortable for White.

15 a4

An ugly-looking move, but White wanted to prevent ...b5.

15...♖fe8 16 ♗a3

Unpinning the knight and attacking both c5- and d5-pawns.

16...♗xc3 17 dxc3

Black has surrendered his other bishop, but by attacking e2 he gains time to exploit the weakness of White's queenside pawns.

17...♘a5 18 ♖e1 c4! 19 bxc4

White must exchange, as 19 b4 ♘b3 costs him the a4-pawn.

19...♘xc4

The knight on c4 utterly dominates the dark-squared bishop.

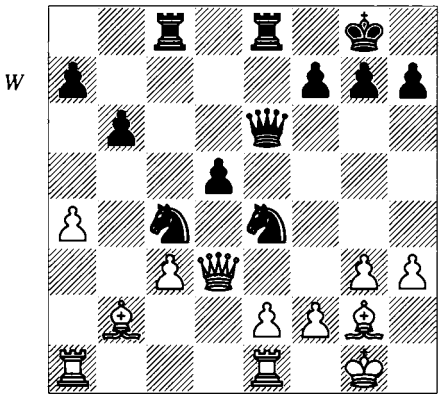
20 ♖a1 ♕e6

Black centralizes his queen to defend d5 and maintain the pressure against e2. Moreover, ...♘e4 is in the air.

21 ♗c1 b6!

It's the little moves that often make a big difference. Black nullifies possible counterplay against his queenside based on ♕d4 and possibly a5.

22 ♕d4 ♘a5 23 ♕d3 ♘e4 24 ♗b2 ♘c4



A perfect picture of knight power. Both knights occupy excellent squares from which they cannot be expelled and the weak c3-pawn is likely to fall within a few moves.

25 ♗c1 ♘e5 26 ♕a6 h5

Before taking the c3-pawn, Black decides to force a further weakness in White's kingside.

27 ♗e3

27 h4 ♘g4 28 f3 ♘c5 followed by ...♘e3 is hopeless for White.

27...h4 28 g4 ♖xc3 29 ♗d4

29 ♗xe4 dxe4 30 ♖ec1 is refuted by the surprising 30...♖xe3! 31 fxe3 ♘xg4! 32 ♕c4 ♕g6 33 hxg4 ♕xg4+ 34 ♔f1 ♕g3! with a decisive attack. 29 ♕xa7 ♖xe3! 30 fxe3 ♕h6 31 ♖a3 ♕d6 32 ♖ea1 ♘c4 followed by ...♕g3 is also very unpleasant for White.

29...♖c4?

29...♘xg4! gives Black a winning attack after 30 hxg4 ♕xg4 or 30 ♗xc3 ♘gxf2!.

30 ♗xe5?

30 ♗xe4 ♖xd4 31 ♗g2 would have kept White in the game.

30...♕xe5 31 ♕xa7

In attempting to regain the lost pawn, White permits a crushing blow on the kingside.

31...♘xf2! 32 ♔xf2 ♕g3+ 33 ♔f1

33 ♔g1 ♖xg4 34 hxg4 h3 wins for Black.

33...♖f4+ 34 ♗f3 ♕xh3+

34...♖xe2! leads to a forced mate, but the move played wins easily enough.

35 ♔g1 ♕g3+ 36 ♔h1 ♖xf3 0-1

Strategy

Middlegame play is often considered to fall into two categories: **tactics** and **strategy**. Tactics deals with short-term, forcing play and most standard combinations, such as those based on forks and pins, fall into this category. I do not deal with the basic combination types in this book, since this would only repeat material covered in my earlier *Learn Chess Tactics* (Gambit, 2004). Strategy is the part of chess involving long-term aims; for example, most decisions about changes in the pawn-structure and the desirability of piece exchanges are strategic in nature. Strategy and tactics are by no means exclusive and in practice they are often interwoven, with tactics being used to gain a strategic advantage or strategy being justified by a tactical point.

The concept of a **plan** is central to chess strategy. Beginners tend to move their pieces around aimlessly and look only for opportunities to win material or threaten mate. More advanced players don't drop pieces or unnecessarily allow mate, so how should you play against such opponents when no tactics are available? The answer is to create a plan, which generally involves identifying a way in which the position may be changed in your favour, and a method of bringing about that change. If, for example, you have a 3 vs 2 pawn-majority on the queenside, the target might be to create a passed pawn, and the details of the plan will involve the method of advancing the pawns so as to create that passed pawn. The target may not necessarily be positional; it could be an attack on the enemy king, in which case the details of the plan will involve bringing pieces to bear on the enemy king position. Other typical plans are to exchange an inactive piece for an active one, to force a weakness in the enemy position by a pawn advance, or to gain greater control of the centre. All these plans are positive in nature, but negative plans, in which you try to prevent your opponent from achieving something, are just as important. In practice, many plans are a combination of both types: you try to achieve your own ambitions while attempting to frustrate your opponent's. Malakhatko-Volokitin (page 50) is a good example of this situation, since Black has to prevent a dangerous f4 advance by White while trying to dominate the kingside dark squares. A knowledge of typical plans based on central pawn-structures is very helpful, and in Miroshnichenko-Safarli (page 51), White was able to adapt a characteristic Modern Benoni plan.

Not being able to think of a plan is a common reason for purposeless play. A good tip is that if you can't think of a way to improve your own position, you should instead try to anticipate and prevent your opponent's plans. Players with an attacking frame of mind may find such negative tactics difficult, but you can't have an advantage in every game and if you don't have an advantage it may not be possible to find a positive plan. Yusupov-Nunn (page 52) is an example of this type of thinking. At any rate, you shouldn't adopt a plan that actually makes your position worse. It's easy to do this if you mistakenly believe you have the advantage, as in Giri-Kariakin (page 53).

All other things being equal, control of the centre confers an almost automatic advantage. Movsesian-Panarin (page 54) shows that total central domination may be worth the sacrifice of some material, in this case the exchange. Even a single extra central pawn can confer an advantage, Anand-Svidler (page 55) being a typical example. Black has a queenside majority to balance White's e-pawn, but in the middlegame an extra central pawn is often more valuable than one on the queenside, and here Anand's better pawn-structure allowed him to launch a dangerous kingside attack.

Earlier I mentioned that many plans are based on improving the position of a piece. Svetushkin-Wang Yue (page 56) is typical. Black identified his most passively placed piece and worked to bring it to a more effective square. It's sometimes possible to activate your own minor pieces while restricting those of the opponent. Anand-Leko (page 57) is a perfect example, in which the advance c4-c5 not only buried Black's bishop on b7, but also cleared the c4-square for White's minor pieces. Anand exploited this by playing first his knight to c4, and later his bishop, setting up a deadly attack against f7.

Controlling more space is generally an advantage, especially if there are still many pieces on the board. The extra space allows one's pieces more freedom to manoeuvre and switch from one part of the board to another. Vitiugov-Ganguly (page 58) is an extreme example. The centre is blocked and White has more space across virtually the whole width of the board. When White launched a kingside attack, Black was left with one bishop totally out of play on the queenside and the attack crashed through. Even in positions without a blocked centre, a space advantage can still prove an asset, although the advantage is likely to be temporary. Almasi-Macieja (page 59) is an example of exploiting a space advantage in an open position to launch a quick attack on the enemy king.

In some positions it may be difficult to realize an advantage because, for example, the position is blocked, or all potential targets are defended. Then it may be necessary to **manoeuvre**, that is to improve one's position bit by bit. Manoeuvring is usually not based on a single plan, because flexibility is important, but it often involves playing in at least two parts of the board. Nunn – Milner-Barry (page 60) is a good example, in which White played on both kingside and queenside, gradually making progress until Black's defence cracked. Gelfand-Wang Yue (page 61) is a more sophisticated case in which White forced an apparently insignificant queenside weakness before returning to the kingside. In the end, the queenside weakness played a crucial role in securing victory.

The next section deals with liquidation to an endgame. There can be various motivations for this, but one of the most common is to defuse an enemy attack on the king. In Westerinen-Hort (page 62), Black used a tactical sequence to force a queen exchange, giving Black the advantage thanks to his two bishops. Bologan-Bauer (page 63) is slightly different; here White stood to gain from a general liquidation since he could penetrate with his rook into Black's position.

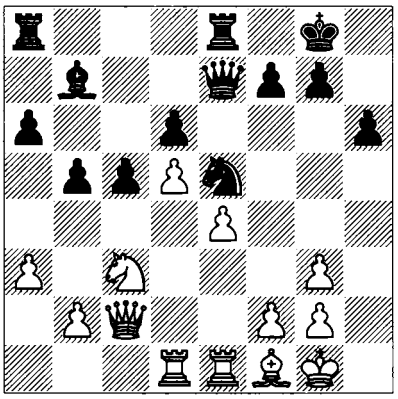
In some middlegames, play becomes focused in a narrow area of the board, and then it's easy to forget that the rest of the board exists. Grishchuk-Ivanchuk (page 64) is an interesting example in which everything apparently revolves around Black's kingside pressure along the g-file. However, White made a mistake allowing Black to sacrifice a pawn to penetrate with his queen via the square a3, and the sudden change of direction proved too much for White. Petrosian-Larsen (page 65) is a classic example of play across the whole board.

The **minority attack** is a strategy which occurs most often in queen's pawn openings where White's c-pawn has been exchanged for Black's e-pawn. It involves White advancing his a- and b-pawns against Black's pawns on a7, b7 and c6 (two pawns against three, hence the name). After White plays a4 and b5, Black usually has a choice between allowing the exchange bxc6 bxc6, leaving him with a backward c-pawn, or meeting b5 by ...c5 or ...cxb5, both of which will generally leave his d-pawn isolated. Van Wely-Short (page 66) provides a model example of the minority attack. Black ended up with a weak c6-pawn and was reduced to a passive defence which eventually cracked under White's mounting pressure. At one time the minority attack was greatly feared, but although it is still regarded with respect, standard methods that can limit its impact are now well-known. Firstly, Black may simply ignore the attack and launch a counter-attack against the white kingside. Secondly, Black may meet b4 with ...b5. This leaves the c6-pawn backward, but this may not matter if Black can follow up by ...♘d7-b6-c4, blocking the half-open c-file. Finally, Black can play ...b6, meeting b5 with ...c5 and thus avoiding the isolated pawn after an exchange on c5. This was Black's strategy in Timman-Short (page 67), and it proved very effective since Black's hanging pawns were balanced by his active pieces.

The next section deals with inferior positions, and the examples here demonstrate two of the main defensive themes: liquidation and the search for counterplay. The player with the advantage has a much easier time of it when he has total control, and even a small amount of counterplay may be enough to distract him from the smooth exploitation of his advantage. In Nielsen-Caruana (page 68), Black held an inferior position by developing counterplay while aiming for judicious piece exchanges. Carlsen-Gashimov (page 69) features another unpleasant position, but Black showed how important it is for the defender to be flexible and adapt his strategy to the attacker's play, always taking advantage of any possibility to move pieces to more active squares or drum up counterplay. After a long period of careful defence, Gashimov was able to secure the half-point.

13 Creating a Plan

B



Malakhatko – Volokitin
Ukrainian Ch, Kharkov 2004

Black has a comfortable position thanks to White's doubled g-pawns. If the g3-pawn were on h2, then White could play f4, meeting ...♘g4 with h3, after which a central breakthrough by e5 would be possible. As it is, f4 is well met by ...♘g4, since it would then be hard to dislodge the knight from g4. Nevertheless, Black must find a way to improve his position. The first step is always to see what your opponent is intending. Here, given a couple of tempi, White will play ♗e2 followed by f4 and ♗f3, greatly improving his position. Black must take action against this plan and he does so by taking the initiative himself on the kingside.

23...h5!

Now 24 ♗e2 h4 25 f4? is met by 25...hxg3! 26 fxe5 ♕h4 27 ♗f3 ♖xe5 with two pawns and a dangerous attack for the piece (the immediate threat is ...g5-g4). It often happens that the execution of a strategic plan depends on a tactical point.

24 ♕d2 h4 25 ♕f4

White intends to meet ...hxg3 by ♕xg3, when f4 will again be possible. However, the position of the queen gives Black the chance to hold up f4 more or less permanently.

25...g5! 26 ♕e3 hxg3 27 ♕xg3 ♕f6

The prospects for playing f4 become more and more distant, especially as Black can play ...♘g6. The only real downside to Black's plan is that it weakens f5, but a knight arriving there (which can only happen after several preparatory moves) can be exchanged by ...♗c8 and ...♗xf5.

28 ♖e3

Given time, White will play ♗e2, ♖f1 and again f4. Up to now, Black's play has been defensive, but now he has the chance to take the initiative himself.

28...♔f8!

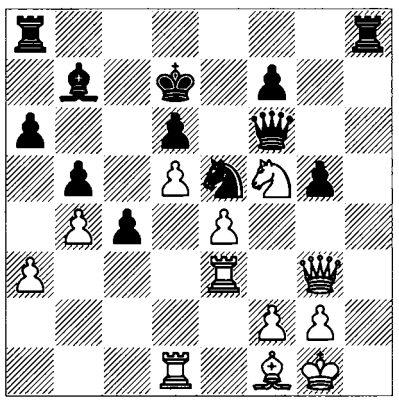
The plan is to move the king to e7 or d7 and bring the rooks to the kingside, again preventing f4 and starting a kingside attack of his own.

29 b4 c4 30 ♘e2

Heading for f5. 30 a4 is met by 30...g4 31 axb5 ♔e7 32 bxa6 ♗xa6 33 b5 ♗c8 followed by ...♖h8 with a decisive attack.

30...♔e7 31 ♘d4 ♖h8 32 ♘f5+ ♔d7

W



33 ♖c3 ♔c7 34 ♕e3 ♗c8 35 f3?

35 ♘g3 is the only chance, although Black keeps a large advantage after 35...g4 36 ♖dc1 ♕h4 37 ♗d3 ♗d7 38 ♗c2 ♘g6.

35...♗xf5 36 exf5 ♕xf5 37 ♖d4 ♕b1?!

Black makes things unnecessarily tricky. Simply 37...♕h7 38 ♕xg5 f5 39 ♔f2 ♖ag8 40 ♕e3 ♕g7 gives him a winning attack.

38 ♕xg5 ♖ag8 39 ♕e7+ ♔c8 40 ♖d2?

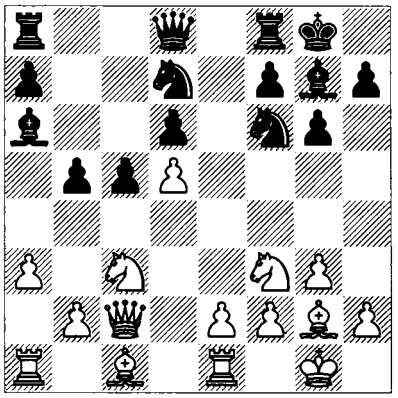
This loses at once. 40 ♖h4 is the only move, but Black should win after 40...♕d1! 41 ♕xd6 ♖xh4 42 ♕xa6+ ♔d8! 43 ♕f6+ ♔d7 44 ♕xh4 ♘xf3+ 45 ♖xf3 ♕xf3 with an extra exchange.

40...♖h1+! 41 ♔xh1 ♕xf1+ 42 ♔h2 ♖h8+ 43 ♔g3 ♕e1+ 44 ♖f2 ♖g8+ 0-1

It's mate in a few moves.

There are various ways of creating a plan, but one of the most common is by analogy. A knowledge of the plans available in similar positions may suggest one which can be transferred to the situation on the board. Often the key factor is the pawn-structure; if this is similar to or the same as a known position, it may well be possible to adapt a plan.

W



Miroshnichenko – Safarli
Moscow 2008

This position arose from a Queen's Indian, but the pawn-structure is the same as in the Modern Benoni. White has a central pawn-majority, and his main plan is based on playing e4-e5. This may be reinforced by pieces, for example by ♗f4, or it may be supported with f4. Black must try to keep control of e5 to prevent White's advance. At this stage the chances are roughly balanced.

13 e4 ♘g4

13...♕b6 14 h3 ♖ac8 15 ♗e3 ♕b7 16 ♗f1! favours White. He has prevented ...b4 while Black must worry about ♗f4 or a4.

14 h3

A perfectly natural plan, which allows White to force through f4 as support for an eventual e5.

14...♘ge5 15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 f4 ♘d7?!

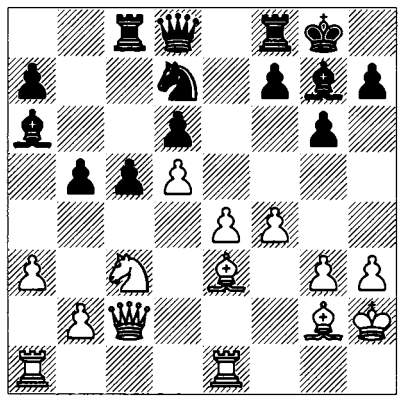
Although this retains control of e5, the knight is not actively placed on d7. 16...♘c4! is better, as White cannot play 17 b3?? because 17...♗d4+ 18 ♔h2 ♕a5 wins. The knight on c4 makes it hard for White to develop his c1-bishop, so he should probably go in for 17 e5 dxe5 18 b3, although after 18...♘d6 19 fxe5 ♖e8 20 ♗f4 g5 the position is totally unclear.

17 ♗e3

With the knight on d7, White has no trouble completing his development.

17...♖c8 18 ♔h2

B



White keeps his rook on a1 for the moment, thereby preventing ...b4 due to the unprotected bishop on a6. The bishop is not usually placed here in the analogous line of the Modern Benoni, and White takes advantage of this factor to hold up Black's queenside play. Analogies are never perfect and it's important to check the impact of any differences.

18...h5?

The natural 18...♖e8 is much better. After the move played, White can again find the correct plan by analogy with the Modern Benoni. In lines of the Benoni involving f4, White often sacrifices a pawn by means of e5, meeting ...dxe5 with f5. The same idea is very effective here; White clears e4 for his pieces, creates a passed d-pawn and blocks in the g7-bishop. Note that 18...h5? then proves a serious weakening of Black's kingside, since after White plays f5 he will already be threatening to take on g6.

19 e5! dxe5 20 f5 ♕b6 21 ♕f2?!

Missing 21 d6! ♕xd6 22 ♖ad1 ♕e7 23 fxg6 with a winning attack; for example, 23...♘f6 24 ♘d5 ♘xd5 25 ♗xd5 and f7 collapses.

21...♕f6 22 ♘e4 ♕xf5 23 ♕e2 ♘b6 24 ♘xc5 ♖xc5 25 ♗xc5 ♖d8 26 ♖ad1 ♘c4?!

26...♕d7 offers more resistance.

27 ♗e7 ♖e8 28 d6 ♗c8 29 b3 ♘b6 30 ♕xb5 ♗d7 31 ♕f1 ♕e6 32 a4 a5 33 b4! axb4 34 a5 ♘a4 35 ♗d5 ♕f5 36 ♕g2 ♖c8 37 ♖f1 ♕c2 38 ♖d2 ♕c3 39 ♖xf7 ♔h8 40 ♗g5 ♘c5 41 ♖c2 1-0

14 When You Can't Think of a Plan

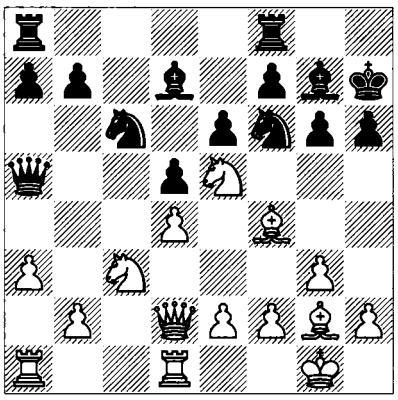
This is an important topic because every player sometimes experiences the problem of staring at the board and being unable to come up with an appealing plan. The results are indecision, time-trouble and choosing moves that are often worse than simply waiting.

A common cause of difficulty in finding a plan is misevaluation of the position. You may feel that you have the advantage, but can't see any way to increase it or put it to use. The problem here may be that you are not in fact better, and should scale down your expectations accordingly. Instead of looking for a large advantage, try to find a way to maintain an edge. Failing all else, at least make sure that you do not play a move that leads to a disadvantage. This problem often arises because a few moves ago you were definitely better, but now you cannot see a good plan. It's often tough to admit to yourself that you may have thrown away part or all of your advantage, but unless you're objective about the position, further mistakes are likely.

Players who prefer active play often react badly to passive positions since they tend to look for a plan that improves their own position. However, in unfavourable positions it is often the case that any attempt at active play only weakens your position. Then it's important to see what your opponent might do to improve his position and find a plan to counteract it.

Here's an example.

B



Yusupov – Nunn
Novi Sad Olympiad 1990

White is slightly better here because all his minor pieces are in reasonable positions, while the d7-bishop is blocked in by the pawns on e6 and d5. However, Black's position is very solid and he is certainly not under much immediate pressure. It doesn't take long to see that Black cannot undertake anything active himself, so the question then is what White can hope to achieve.

The first point to note is that White has an immediate tactical threat of ♘xc6 followed by ♘xd5, exploiting the undefended black queen to win a pawn. The solution to this immediate problem is to exchange on e5 and then withdraw the queen.

In the longer term, White's main plan involves opening the position and activating the g2-bishop by playing e4. This, however, involves some risk since it gives White an isolated d-pawn. The easiest way to counter this is to have Black's light-squared bishop free to move to c6, ready to oppose bishops on the long diagonal. This again points to the exchange on e5 as being the right decision. Thereafter Black's plan is to exchange pieces, develop his rooks and prevent White from playing e4 under favourable circumstances. This is of course a negative plan, seeking only to nullify White's ambitions, but you have to play the position on the board. If this gives no scope for active play then it's unwise to force matters.

16...♘xe5 17 ♗xe5

After 17 dxe5 ♘g4 White's e5-pawn is weak.

17...♕b6 18 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 19 e3

White's only chance for active play is 19 e4, but after 19...♘xe4 20 ♘xe4 dxe4 21 ♗xe4 ♗a4 22 ♖e1 f6 23 ♗f4 f5 24 ♗f3 ♗xd4 25 ♗xh6 ♖xc1 26 ♖xc1 ♗xf2+! Black is safe.

19...♖fd8 20 ♗f1 ♘e8

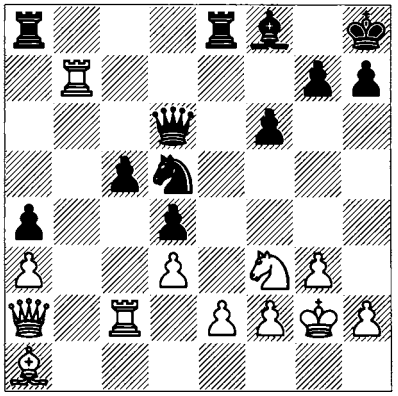
Heading for more exchanges.

21 ♗xg7 ½-½

White offered a draw which I accepted since after 21...♔xg7 22 ♗d3 ♘d6 the position is dead equal. The exchanges have relieved the pressure on Black's position and a subsequent ...♖c7 and ...♖dc8 will probably lead to further simplification.

Perhaps the most important advice is that if you can't think of a good plan, at least don't play a bad one.

B



Giri – Kariakin
Amber Rapid, Monaco 2011

Assessing this position is not easy, and the grandmasters watching the game had sharply diverging opinions about its evaluation. The most notable feature is the buried bishop on a1, which is doing little at the moment. Balanced against this, Black's own bishop isn't exactly bursting with activity, while White's other pieces are all well placed. On balance, the position is roughly level, but some GMs thought that the position should favour Black, since there's no obvious solution to the problem of the a1-bishop.

25...g5?

Except if Black creates one! This is a good example of the disastrous consequences of playing actively when the position isn't strong enough to support it. Black hopes to play ...g4, chasing away the knight, and then ...♕c6, but the line-up of the a1-bishop and the king on h8 should have rung a warning bell.

Black should continue more modestly by 25...♖eb8, aiming to exchange or displace the active rook on b7. After 26 ♕b1 (26 ♖cb2 ♖xb7 27 ♖xb7 ♕c6 is also level) 26...♖xb7 27 ♕xb7 ♖b8 28 ♕a7 ♖b1 29 ♗b2 ♕e6 30 h3 ♘b6 the position is equal.

26 e4!

Giri doesn't miss the chance to exploit the weakening of the long diagonal.

26...dxe3

The best choice, since 26...♘e7? allows the attractive finish 27 ♖xc5 ♕xc5 28 ♗xd4 ♕c6 29 ♘xg5 ♕xb7 30 ♗xf6+ ♗g7 31 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 32 ♕f7+ ♔h6 33 ♕xh7+ ♔xg5 34 ♕g7+ ♘g6 35 f4+ ♔h5 36 g4+ ♔xg4 37 ♕xg6+ ♔xf4 38 ♕g3#. By 26...♖e7?! 27 ♕b1 ♖ae8 Black sets the trap 28 exd5? g4, when he escapes, but 28 ♖b5! leaves Black in trouble.

27 ♘xg5 ♔g8?

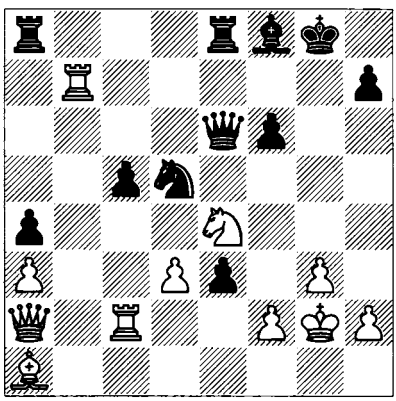
Black should play 27...♘f4+! 28 ♔g1 (28 gxf4 ♕c6+ 29 ♔g3 ♕xb7 30 ♗xf6+ ♗g7 31 ♘f7+ ♔g8 32 ♘d6+ ♕b3 33 ♘xe8 ♖xe8 34 ♗xg7 ♕xa2 35 ♖xa2 ♔xg7 is very drawish) 28...exf2+ 29 ♖xf2 ♖e1+ 30 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 31 ♔xf1 ♕xd3+ 32 ♔f2 ♕d5 33 ♕xd5 ♘xd5, when he still has good drawing chances.

28 ♘e4?

Missing the instantly decisive 28 ♖b6! ♕xb6 29 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 30 ♖b2 ♕a6 31 ♖b7.

28...♕e6

W



29 ♖d7?!

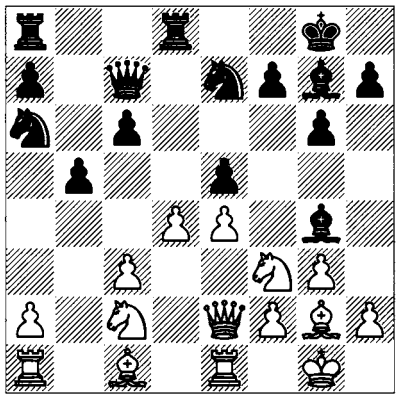
White can reach a very favourable ending by 29 ♗xf6 exf2 30 ♖xf2 ♘e3+ 31 ♔f3 ♕xa2 32 ♖xa2 ♘d5 33 ♗g5.

29...♖ad8?

This loses at once. The only move is 29...c4!. After 30 ♖xc4 ♗e7 31 ♖b7 ♖ab8 32 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 33 ♕e2 White retains an advantage due to the activity of his bishop on the long diagonal, but Black can still hope to defend.

30 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 31 ♕xd5+ ♖xd5 32 ♘xf6+ ♔f7 33 ♘xd5 e2 34 ♗c3 e1♕ 35 ♗xe1 ♖xe1 36 ♘c3 1-0

15 Central Pawns



Movsesian – Panarin
Russian Team Ch, Dagomys 2010

In the middlegame, a central pawn is generally more effective than a flank pawn. Here White has an advantage thanks to his extra central pawn and Black's poorly-placed a6-knight, which has few active prospects.

15...exd4

Black gives up his foothold in the centre in the hope that his pressure on the long dark diagonal will enable him to break up White's pawn duo on d4 and e4.

16 cxd4 c5 17 ♗f4 ♕d7 18 d5!

This refutes Black's idea. White intends to keep his central pawns even at the cost of the exchange. If Black takes on a1, he will not only have to cope with White's pawns, but in addition his kingside will be exposed. A typical line is 18...♗xa1 19 ♖xa1 c4 20 d6 ♘c6 21 a4! bxa4 22 ♕xc4 ♗xf3 23 ♗xf3 g5 24 ♗xg5 ♘e5 25 ♕e2 ♘c5 26 ♗e7 with a clear advantage for White.

18...c4

Black hopes to activate his a6-knight by ...♘c5 and ...♘d3.

19 ♕e3!

An excellent response, not only unpinning the f3-knight and thereby threatening 20 ♘e5, but also preventing Black's ...♘c5 idea.

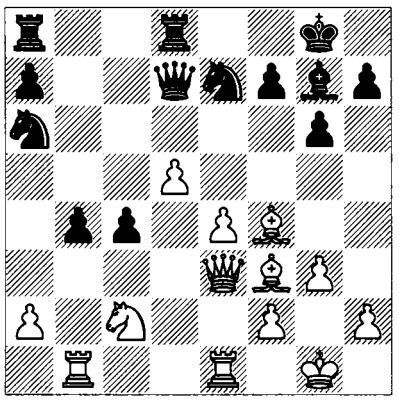
19...♗xf3

Black is forced to make this exchange to stop ♘e5, but now he faces new problems on the long light diagonal.

20 ♗xf3 b4?!

Black's queenside pawns are far less effective than White's central pawn-mass. Central pawns are better because they are more likely to attack enemy pieces as they advance, and because the advance of central pawns very often leads to an attack on the enemy king. After 20...♗xa1 21 ♖xa1 f6 22 ♕c3 ♖f8 23 ♕a3 ♕b7 24 ♖b1 White's numerous advantages (two bishops, passed d-pawn, knight penetrating to d4 and then c6 or e6) are worth far more than Black's extra exchange.

21 ♖ab1



Avoiding the bishop's attack, and gaining time by threatening the b4-pawn.

21...♕a4 22 ♘d4 ♘c5

The knight finally escapes from a6, but it's too late as White's central pawns are ready to advance.

23 d6 ♘d3 24 e5

This multi-purpose move blocks the long dark-square diagonal and so threatens to take on e7, and also opens the f3-bishop's diagonal to attack the rook on a8.

24...♘xe1 25 ♖xe1

Black is temporarily the exchange up, but the central pawns give White a winning position.

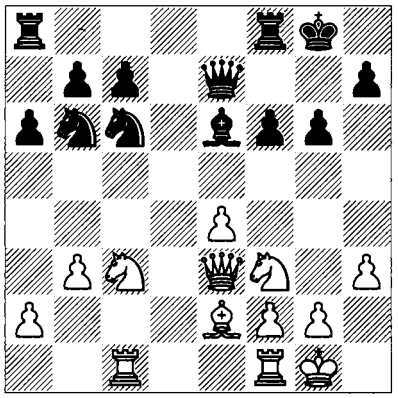
25...♘f5 26 ♘xf5 gxf5 27 ♗xa8 ♖xa8 28 e6

A devastating move; Black cannot take, since 28...fxe6 29 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 30 d7 followed by ♕e8+ leads to a forced mate, so the pawns roll on unopposed.

28...♕e8 29 d7 ♕xe6 30 ♕d2 1-0

It's all over after 30...♕f6 31 ♖e8+.

W



Anand – Svidler
Moscow 2009

Even a single extra central pawn can confer an advantage, although this may be slight. Here the position is close to equality, but White retains an edge thanks to his e-pawn. It's possible that Black's queenside pawns would play a significant role in the endgame, but in the middlegame White's central majority is a more important factor, not only because it offers more influence and space in the centre, but also because it could provide the foundation for an attack against Black's slightly weakened kingside.

18 ♖fe1 ♖ad8 19 ♗f1

White envisages moving his knight from f3 and starting an attack by pushing his f-pawn; this modest move removes the bishop from attack after a possible ...♘d4.

19...♗f7 20 ♘h2

If White is given time, a combination of ♘g4 and f4-f5 would generate real kingside threats.

20...♗e6

Black's bishop returns to e6, ready to take the knight if it jumps to g4. The problem is that if White manages to force through f4-f5, the bishop will have to move again, costing time.

21 f4 ♘d4?

A serious error, allowing White to play f5 without a fight. From a purely visual perspective, the knight looks actively placed on d4, but in fact it achieves little there and is unable to join in the defence of the threatened kingside. 21...♖fe8 is far more purposeful, preventing f5, at least for the moment, since 22 f5? simply loses a pawn after 22...♗xf5.

22 f5 ♗f7

22...gxf5? costs Black a piece after 23 exf5, so the bishop has to retreat.

23 ♘g4 gxf5

This is obviously risky, but Black didn't have a better move. White threatened to step up the pressure by ♕h6, when a breakthrough by e5 would be in the air. Thanks to the bad position of the knight on d4, Black no longer has the possibility of ...♘e5 to swap off White's dangerous g4-knight. 23...♘c6 now comes too late, since after 24 ♘e2! ♘e5 25 ♘h6+ ♔g7 26 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 27 ♘f4 Black suffers from the terrible weakness of the e6-square.

24 ♘h6+ ♔h8

24...♔g7 25 ♕xd4 ♔xh6 26 exf5 ♖xd4 27 ♖xe7 ♖d7 28 ♖xd7 ♘xd7 29 ♘e4 gives White a very favourable ending.

25 ♕f2!

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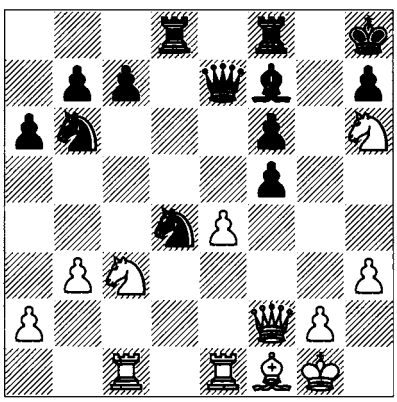


25...fxe4?

A blunder losing at once. Black should try 25...♗h5 26 ♘d5 ♕d6 27 ♘xb6 ♕xb6 28 exf5 or 25...f4 26 ♕xf4 ♕e5 27 ♕f2, although White retains a definite advantage in both lines thanks to Black's broken kingside.

26 ♖xe4 ♕d6

After 26...♘e6 27 ♕e3 ♖fe8 28 ♖e1 White wins a piece thanks to the deadly pin along the e-file.

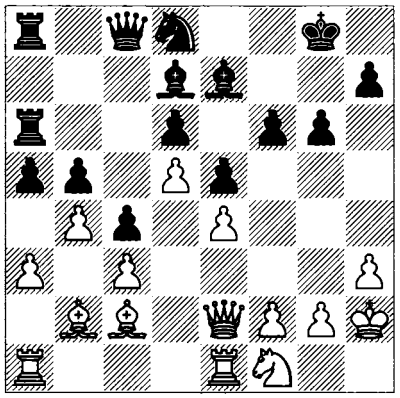
27 ♖d1 c5 28 ♘xf7+ ♖xf7 29 b4!

The poor positioning of the d4-knight now proves fatal, as there is no reasonable way to avoid its loss.

29...f5 30 bxc5 fxe4 31 ♕xf7 ♘f3+ 32 ♕xf3

1-0

16 Improving Piece Position



Svetushkin – Wang Yue
Moscow 2007

Many plans involve improving the activity of a single piece. This position is close to equality, with Black's main asset being his pressure along the a-file. White always wants to meet ...axb4 with axb4 because playing cxb4 would leave White with a backward a-pawn and Black with a protected passed c-pawn. Thus the a-file pressure prevents White from activating his b2-bishop by ♗c1-e3, since ♗c1 would be met by ...axb4. Although White's movements are a little restricted, he isn't under any real pressure, so Black must find a plan to improve his position. A good start is to look for a piece that isn't doing much and see if it can be moved to a more active square. Here both the d8-knight and the e7-bishop aren't pulling their weight, so Black focuses on transferring them to better squares. Playing ...♗f8-h6 is a perfectly reasonable idea, but Black decides on the equally good plan of ...♘f7 followed by ...♗d8-b6.

26...♘f7 27 ♘e3?!

Here and over the next few moves, White adopts the wrong plan. He aims for kingside play based on f4, but it's hard for this to achieve anything when Black has a firm grip on e5. 27 bxa5 ♖xa5 28 ♘e3 is correct, aiming for a4 and the liquidation of the pawns on the a- and b-files. In this case, Black's a-file pressure is nullified and an exchange of all the rooks is very likely.

27...♗d8 28 ♖f1 ♗b6 29 ♖ae1 ♔g7 30 ♗b1 axb4

White has conceded the a-file, so Black may as well swap pawns. Although he cannot penetrate with a rook at the moment, White's bishops are tied down to covering a1 and a2.

31 axb4 ♕e8

To meet 32 f4 with 32...exf4 33 ♖xf4 ♕e5.

32 g3?!

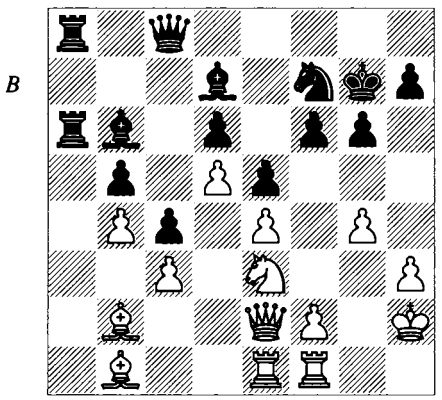
Preparing f4, but weakening the h3-pawn.

32...♕c8!

Forcing an awkward decision.

33 g4?!

After this White is in real trouble. 33 h4 is better, although after 33...h5 followed by ...♘h6 White will be in no position to play f4 due to the resulting weakness of g4.



33...♗xe3

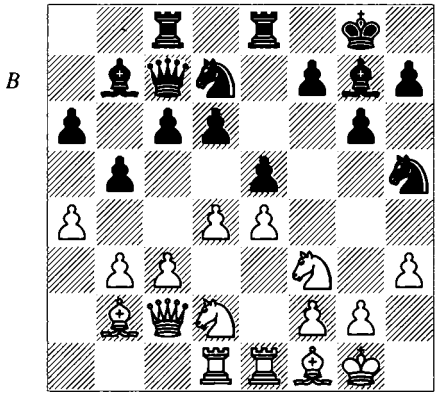
Black's plan has succeeded: his bad bishop from e7 is exchanged for an active white knight.

34 fxe3

34 ♕xe3 is met by another plan based on improving the position of a piece: 34...g5 followed by ...♘h8-g6-f4 and eventually ...h5.

34...♕d8 35 ♖f3 ♕e7 36 ♖ef1 ♖f8 37 ♕g2

Now 37...h5! gives Black a decisive advantage in all lines: 38 ♖g3 (after 38 gxh5 ♘g5 Black wins material, while 38 ♖xf6 hxg4 39 h4 ♕xf6 40 ♖xf6 ♔xf6 followed by ...♖h8 is also winning for Black) 38...hxg4 39 hxg4 ♖h8+ 40 ♔g1 ♘g5, followed by bringing the major pieces to the h-file, leads to a decisive attack for Black. He actually played **37...♖aa8?!**, retaining an edge which he eventually converted into a win (0-1, 81).



Anand – Leko
Amber Blindfold, Nice 2009

The activity of a single piece can sometimes prove decisive, so a plan which involves securing an active square for a key piece can be the turning point of a game. This is a typical Ruy Lopez position in which White has managed to keep his central pawn duo on d4 and e4 intact. While this gives him a slight edge, Black has no cause for complaint since his development has been completed smoothly; indeed, in one respect he has the advantage over White in that his g7-bishop is active, whereas neither of White's bishops is doing a great deal. The main problem for both sides is to secure good positions for their minor pieces, with Black facing particular difficulty regarding the b7-bishop.

20...bxa4?

Black attempts to solve his problems by force, but this does not lead to equality. 20...♘f4 followed by ...♘e6 is sounder, centralizing the knight and awaiting events.

21 bxa4 d5

In situations where many captures are possible, it's usually a substantial advantage to move first. By choosing the correct sequence of captures, White is able to clarify the position in his favour. His plan has three elements: activate the b2-bishop, keep the b7-bishop passive and secure good squares for the d2-knight.

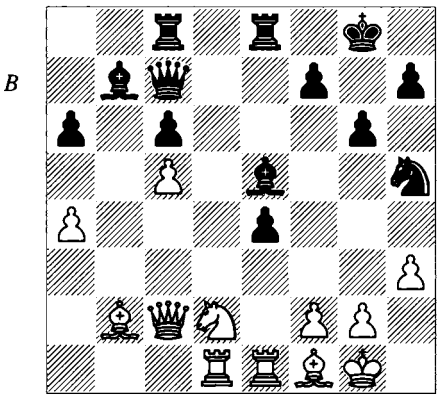
22 dxe5 ♘xe5 23 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 24 c4!

This prevents Black from activating the b7-bishop by playing ...c5.

24...dxe4

Even worse is 24...dxc4 25 ♗xe5 followed by ♘xc4.

25 c5!



The decisive move. White does not need to recapture the e4-pawn straight away and instead uses the tempo to secure his strategic aims. White's knight now has a beautiful outpost on d6, while the b7-bishop is totally shut out.

25...♗xb2

Black cannot maintain the extra pawn since 25...f5 loses material after 26 ♕b3+ ♔f8 27 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 28 ♘c4 followed by ♘d6. The crucial point is that 25...e3 26 ♖xe3 ♗h2+ 27 ♔h1 ♖xe3 28 fxe3 doesn't lead to anything for Black as 28...♘g3+? 29 ♔xh2 ♘xf1++ 30 ♔g1 ♘xe3 fails to 31 ♕c3.

26 ♕xb2 e3

Now 26...f5 27 ♘xe4! ♖xe4 28 ♖xe4 fxe4 29 ♗c4+ ♔f8 30 ♕h8+ ♔e7 31 ♕xh7+ is catastrophic, so Black cannot prevent White from regaining the pawn. By playing ...e3, he at least breaks up White's pawn-structure slightly.

27 fxe3 ♖cd8 28 ♘c4 ♖xd1 29 ♖xd1 ♕e7 30 ♘d6!

White's plan has worked to perfection and he now has a decisive advantage. The immediate target is f7.

30...♖d8

After 30...♕xe3+ 31 ♕f2 ♕xf2+ 32 ♔xf2 ♖d8 33 ♖b1 ♗a8 34 ♗xa6 the a-pawn gives White a winning position.

31 ♕d4

31 ♗c4! ♖f8 32 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 33 ♖f1 wins at once, but Anand's method is sufficient.

31...♖f8 32 ♗c4 ♗c8 33 ♖b1 ♘g3 34 e4 ♕g5

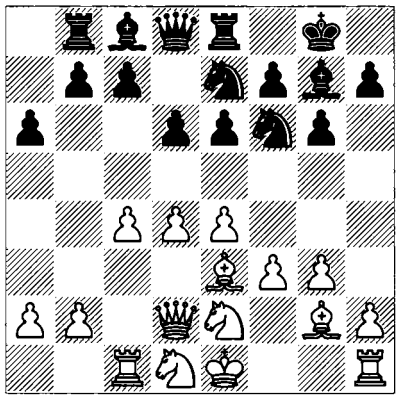
Allowing a neat finish.

35 ♗xf7+! ♖xf7 36 ♕h8+ 1-0

17 Space Advantage

Vitiugov – Ganguly
Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 g6 3 e4 d6 4 d4 ♗g7 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 ♘c6 7 ♘ge2 a6 8 ♕d2 ♖b8 9 ♖c1 e6 10 ♘d1 ♖e8 11 g3 ♘e7 12 ♗g2



Black's passive handling of the opening has left White with a broad pawn-centre. Such a centre needs to be attacked as quickly as possible, since given time White will complete his development and consolidate his space advantage.

12...b5?!

12...b6 followed by ...c5 is a more effective way of challenging White's centre.

13 c5 b4 14 ♘f2 a5 15 0-0 ♗a6 16 ♖fd1

White's last piece comes into play. A large space advantage such as this offers flexibility and freedom to manoeuvre, and generally confers an automatic advantage if it can be maintained. Black can exchange his a6-bishop, but this would not solve his problems as it would leave his queenside vulnerable to penetration.

16...♘d7

Hoping to continue with ...dxc5 followed by ...♘e5, but White can easily prevent this.

17 f4 d5 18 e5

The blocked centre cements White's space advantage and leaves Black without any effective way of challenging White's central pawns.

18...♘f5 19 ♔h1 ♖a8 20 ♘g1

The knight had few prospects on e2, so White prepares to switch it to f3 or h3. Moreover, Black no longer has the option of exchanging his light-squared bishop. Although this bishop may appear active, it is easy for White to manoeuvre around the squares it controls, with the result that it is striking into thin air.

20...♘b8 21 g4 ♘xe3

After 21...♘h4 22 ♗h3 Black has to worry about f5 followed by ♗g5.

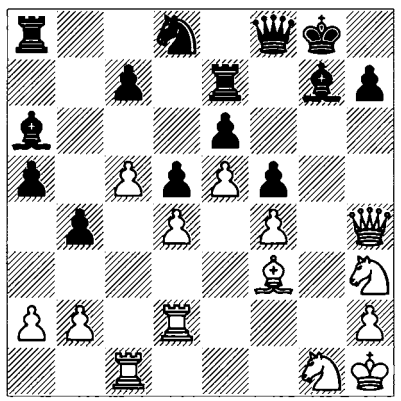
22 ♕xe3 f5

Black takes action himself; otherwise White will play ♘f3, ♗h3, ♖g1 and eventually f5.

23 gxf5 gxf5 24 ♕h3 ♘c6

White will always be able to assemble more firepower on the kingside than Black, firstly because the a6-bishop is completely cut off from the kingside and secondly because White's extra space makes it easier for him to manoeuvre his pieces into position.

25 ♗f3 ♖e7 26 ♖d2 ♕f8 27 ♕h4 ♘d8 28 ♘fh3



28...c6 29 ♗h5 ♖aa7 30 ♘f3 ♗h6 31 ♖g1+ ♖g7 32 ♘fg5

The side with the space advantage should avoid unnecessary exchanges, so here White spurns a rook swap.

32...♔h8

32...♗xg5 33 fxg5 does not help Black, as White can follow up with ♘f4, ♗d1 and ♘h5-f6.

33 ♗f3 ♖g6 34 ♖dg2

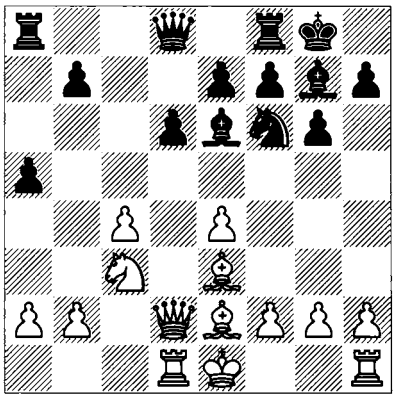
Threatening 35 ♘xh7.

34...♕e7 35 ♕h5 ♗xg5 36 ♘xg5 ♕g7 37 ♘xh7 1-0

After 37...♕xh7 38 ♕xg6 White wins easily.

Z. Almasi – Macieja
Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 c4 ♘f6 6 ♘c3 d6 7 ♗e2 ♘xd4 8 ♕xd4 ♗g7 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 ♕d2 a5 11 ♖d1 ♗e6


W

White has a space advantage, but despite this Black can complete his development without difficulty. White's spatial plus is a factor in the position, but it is not sufficient to confer an automatic advantage; much depends on whether White can translate it into something more significant. In the game White, by dynamic play, managed to maintain his extra space even though the position became quite open. Unlike space advantages in closed positions, which tend to be permanent and best exploited by manoeuvring, space advantages in more fluid positions are often exploited by being converted into another type of advantage, or even a direct attack.

12 0-0 a4

The advance of the a-pawn means that White cannot support the c4-pawn by b3 without allowing Black to open lines on the queenside.

13 f4 ♕a5 14 ♗d4

It's essential to occupy the long diagonal since otherwise a later b3 will leave the c3-knight too vulnerable to attack.

14...♕b4?!

The idea is to force a3, after which White will not be able to defend the c4-pawn by b3, but the time spent on this manoeuvre gives White the chance to increase his advantage. 14...♖fc8 15 b3 axb3 16 axb3 ♕a3 is better, although White retains an edge.

15 a3 ♕a5

15...♕b3?! 16 ♖de1! is awkward for Black, since 16...♗xc4?? loses his queen after 17 ♗d1.

16 ♕e3

Threatening an instant win by 17 ♗b6 ♕a6 18 ♘d5.

16...♖ac8

16...♘d7? loses to 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 f5 gxf5 19 exf5 ♗xf5 20 ♖d5.

17 ♗b6 ♕a8 18 c5

The weak c4-pawn disappears, and in the resulting more open position White retains his space advantage and in addition has more active pieces.

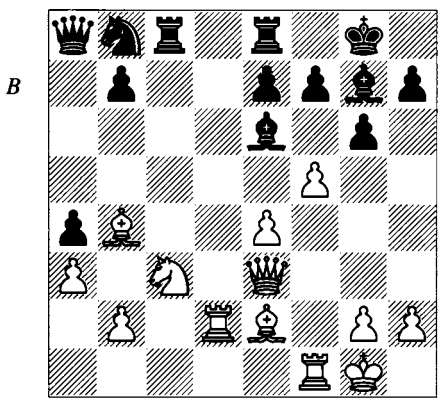
18...dxc5 19 ♗xc5 ♖fe8 20 ♖d2 ♘d7?!

There's no really satisfactory plan for Black, but 20...b5 at least opens a line for the queen.

21 ♗b4 ♘b8

Intending ...♘c6 followed by ...♘a5, but Black has no time to execute this plan.

22 f5!


B

Black's pieces are badly placed, so White takes the chance to advance his pawns, converting his space advantage into a kingside attack.

22...♗b3 23 ♘d5 ♘c6 24 ♘b6 ♕a7 25 ♗c5 ♖cd8 26 ♘d7 ♕a8 27 ♗b6 ♖c8?!

Now White's attack crashes through. After 27...♕c8 28 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 29 f6 ♖xd7 30 ♗g4 e6 31 fxg7 ♖xd2 32 ♕xd2 White still has to exploit his material advantage.

28 e5! ♘a5 29 e6 gxf5 30 ♖xf5

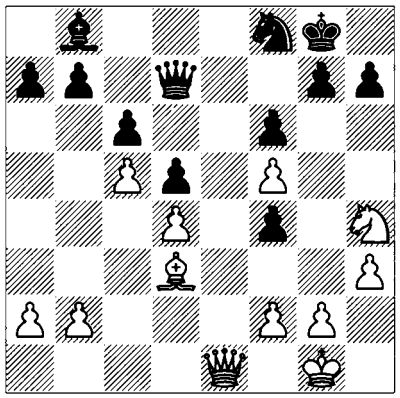
Attacking a5 and f7.

30...♖c1+ 31 ♔f2 ♘c6 32 ♖xf7 ♔h8 33 ♕e4

With the lethal threat of ♗d3.

33...♖h1 34 h3 1-0

18 Manoeuvring



Nunn – Milner-Barry
Oxford 1971

This position is rather symmetrical, but White has some small advantages: he controls the e-file, at least for the moment, he has more space on the queenside and his bishop has better scope. However, if Black manages to oppose queens on the e-file, White's advantage will be much reduced.

33 ♗c2!

Heading for d1 and h5 without at any stage blocking the e-file.

33...♔f7 34 ♗d1 ♔g8?

A serious mistake. With the bishop on h5, White will have a permanent grip on Black's position. He should prevent ♗h5 by 34...g6, restricting White to an edge.

35 ♗h5

Black is now without counterplay and his queen must stay on d7 or d8 to prevent White's own queen from penetrating to e7 or e8, while a knight move would allow ♕e6. Despite the advantage afforded by his control of the e-file, White must manoeuvre in order to make progress. A common idea is to create play in another part of the board, and here the queenside is the obvious place. By playing for b4-b5, White will open up more lines and leave Black with a weak pawn at either c6 or d5.

35...♕d8 36 b3 ♗c7 37 b4 ♕d7 38 ♗e8 ♕d8 39 a4 a6

39...♗e5 doesn't help as 40 dxe5 ♕xe8 41 e6 gives White a monster protected passed pawn.

40 ♕e2

There's no counterplay so White can take time to improve his position before playing b5. This move prevents Black from activating his bishop with tempo by ...♗a5.

40...♗b8 41 ♘f3

The immediate 41 b5 is also good, but White is patient, first removing his knight from its offside position.

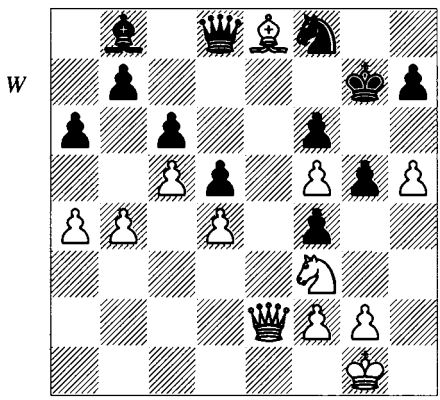
41...g6

Black seeks counterplay. If he waits with 41...♗c7, then 42 b5 axb5 43 axb5 cxb5 44 ♗xb5 ♕a8 45 ♗e8 ♕d8 46 ♗a4 followed by ♗b3 will soon win the d5-pawn.

42 h4

Now that Black has played ...g6, White can also generate activity on the kingside.

42...♔g7 43 h5 g5



44 h6+! ♔g8

44...♔xh6 loses to 45 ♘xg5 fxg5 46 ♕h5+ ♔g7 47 ♕f7+ ♔h8 48 ♕xf8#.

45 ♘h2

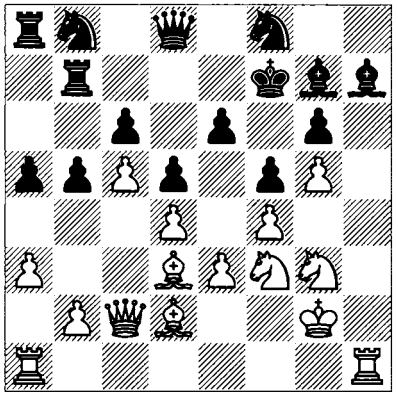
Transferring the knight to g4.

45...♕c7 46 f3 ♔h8 47 ♘g4 ♕d8 48 ♗f7

There are many ways to win.

48...♗c7 1-0

My intended continuation was 49 a5 ♕d7 (49...♗b8 50 ♕e8 ♕xe8 51 ♗xe8 ♗c7 52 ♘xf6 transposes) 50 ♗e8 ♕d8 51 ♗h5 (51 ♗xc6 bxc6 52 ♕xa6 ♕e7 53 ♔f2 also wins) 51...♔g8 (or 51...♗b8 52 ♕e8) 52 ♕e8 ♕xe8 53 ♘xf6+ ♔h8 54 ♗xe8 with an easy win as Black's king and knight are immobilized.



Gelfand – Wang Yue
Medias 2010

White has an obvious advantage due to his extra space, but owing to the blocked position there is no immediate way to exploit it. White must manoeuvre in order to make progress, rearranging his pieces so as to create different threats which increase the pressure on the enemy position.

28 ♖h3

The first step is to triple the major pieces on the h-file. This is most effective when the queen is behind the two rooks.

28...♔g8 29 ♖ah1 ♖aa7 30 ♔f1 ♕e8 31 ♗e1 ♗h8 32 ♖h6 ♗g7 33 ♖6h4 ♗h8 34 ♖1h3 ♖e7 35 ♕h2 ♖eb7 36 ♖h6 ♖e7

Black has managed to meet the immediate threats along the h-file, and it seems likely that White will have to make a sacrifice of some kind in order to break through. It's important not to rush; if you are going to sacrifice then you should make sure that your pieces are ideally placed first. Gelfand's next step is to attack the a5-pawn, forcing it to advance to a4. This will free the b4-square for a white knight and, in the long run, give White the opportunity for queenside play by b3. Manoeuvring is often based on play in two different areas of the board.

37 ♘e2 ♖eb7 38 ♘c1 ♖e7 39 ♘b3 a4

If 39...♕d8 then 40 ♕d2 forces the a-pawn's advance in any case.

40 ♘c1 ♖eb7 41 ♗e2 ♖e7 42 ♘d3 ♖eb7

White's pieces are now as well posted as they can be: the bishop is ready to go to h5, while the d3-knight can move to e5 or b4 as appropriate.

43 ♘h4!

Threatening 44 ♘xg6 ♘xg6 45 ♗h5 ♖g7 46 ♘e5 – this is why White left the knight on d3 rather than playing it to b4 first.

43...♗g7

The only way to meet the threat, but now White has a different sacrifice.

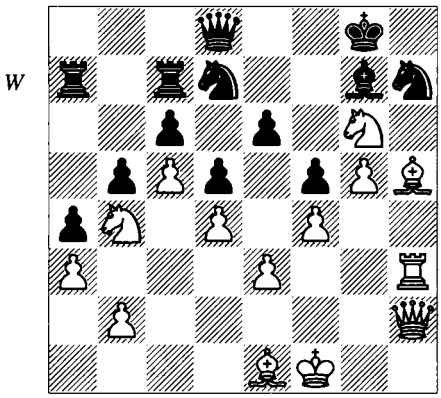
44 ♖xh7! ♘xh7

44...♔xh7? 45 ♘xg6+ ♔g8 46 ♖h8+ ♔f7 47 ♘de5+ ♗xe5 48 fxe5 leads to a quick mate.

45 ♘xg6 ♘d7 46 ♗h5 ♕d8 47 ♘b4

Making use of the queenside possibilities to attack the weak c6-pawn.

47...♖c7



48 ♘h8!! ♘df8

The critical line is 48...♔xh8 (48...♗xh8 loses to 49 ♗f7+! ♔xf7 50 ♖xh7+ ♗g7 51 g6+! ♔f8 52 ♖xg7) 49 ♗f7 ♘df8 50 ♖xh7+! ♘xh7 51 g6 ♗h6! 52 ♕xh6 ♖xf7 53 gxf7 ♖xf7 54 ♘xc6 and Black will be unable to cope with both the passed c-pawn and the threats to his king.

49 ♘f7 ♖xf7 50 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 51 ♖xh7 ♕e8

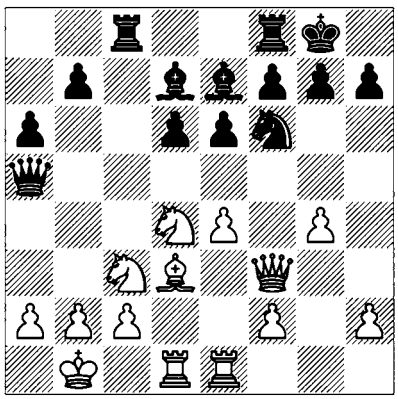
Or 51...♘xh7 52 g6 ♖c7 53 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 54 ♗h4! ♕e8 55 ♗g5 and White wins easily.

52 ♖h3

In addition to his other advantages, White has a clear extra pawn. The win is slow but sure.

52...♘g6 53 ♕e2 ♖c7 54 ♕h5 ♔f7 55 ♕h7 ♕g8 56 ♕xg8+ ♔xg8 57 ♘d3 ♖a7 58 ♔e2 ♔f7 59 ♘b4 ♘e7 60 ♔d1 ♖a8 61 ♔c2 ♖g8 62 ♘d3 ♖a8 63 ♖h7 ♘g6 64 b3 ♘f8 65 ♖h2 axb3+ 66 ♔xb3 ♔e8 67 ♖a2 ♔d7 68 a4 bxa4+ 69 ♖xa4 ♖xa4 70 ♔xa4 ♔c8 71 ♗a5 ♘g6 72 ♘b4 ♔d7 73 ♘a6 ♔c8 74 ♗c7 ♗f8 75 ♔a5 ♔b7 76 ♗d6 ♗e7 77 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 78 ♘b4 ♘g8 79 ♘d3 ♘e7 80 ♘e5 ♘g8 81 g6 ♘f6 82 g7 1-0

19 Liquidating to an Endgame



Westerinen – Hort
Dortmund (3) 2007

In this double-edged Sicilian position, White starts a dangerous attack:

14 e5!? dxe5 15 ♘b3

After the queen moves, White has ideas based on g5 and ♗xh7+. Black can try to defend passively by 15...♕c7 16 g5 ♘e8, since there is nothing clear-cut for White, but Hort finds a better solution based on liquidation to an endgame. There are several factors indicating that this is the best option: Black has a long-term positional advantage based on his two bishops and better pawn-structure (White has dislocated his kingside pawns by pushing the g-pawn), and a liquidation will nullify White's attacking chances. Later, in Section 60, we shall look at the related topic of defence by exchanging individual attacking pieces, but here we are considering more extensive exchanges leading directly to an endgame.

15...♕b4! 16 g5

After 16 a3 ♕xg4 17 ♕xg4 ♘xg4 18 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 19 ♖xd7 ♗h4 20 ♖xb7 ♗xf2 Black wins a pawn.

16...♗c6

All part of a forcing tactical sequence.

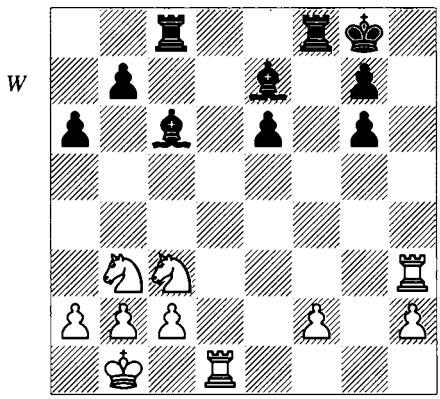
17 ♕h3 ♕g4 18 ♗xh7+ ♔h8

White must swap queens or he loses a piece.

19 ♗f5+ ♕xh3 20 ♗xh3 ♘h7 21 g6

21 ♖xe5 ♘xg5 22 ♖e3 ♖cd8 is clearly better for Black, so White uses his g-pawn to break up Black's pawns.

21...♘g5 22 ♖xe5 ♘xh3 23 ♖h5+ ♔g8 24 ♖xh3 fxg6



The liquidation has turned out very well for Black, since in this open position his two bishops are far stronger than White's knights. It's hard to say whether his advantage guarantees victory, but at any rate White has an arduous defence ahead of him, while Black can play for a win with no risk at all. At move 15 Black had to do some work calculating the tactics, but it was effort well spent.

25 ♘d4 ♖xf2 26 ♘xe6?

26 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 27 a3 offers better drawing chances. Admittedly, White is a pawn down, but Black's pawns are broken and at least White has removed one of the menacing bishops.

26...♗f3 27 ♖g1 ♗f6?

27...g5! is crushing, since after the coming ...g4 White's rook will have nowhere to go. Playing ♖hg3 leads to the rook being trapped, while after ♖h5 Black can reply ...g3.

28 ♘f4 ♗xc3 29 ♘xg6!

Now Black must cope with the threats of ♘e7+ and ♖h8+.

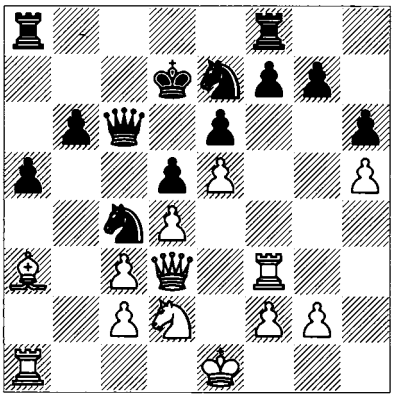
29...♗g4 30 ♖hg3??

This blunder loses at once. After 30 ♖xc3 ♖xc3 31 bxc3 the result should be a draw.

30...♗f6!

The refutation, since it allows Black to double rooks on the seventh rank.

31 ♖xg4 ♖cxc2 32 ♖b4 ♖xb2+ 33 ♖xb2 ♖xb2+ 34 ♔c1 ♖xa2 35 ♖g4 ♖xh2 36 ♔d1 b5 37 ♘f4 ♖h4 0-1



Bologan – Bauer
Enghien-les-Bains 1999

Nullifying an enemy attack isn't the only motivation for liquidating to an endgame. In this rather unclear position, White has an active bishop on a3 and chances of attacking the kingside pawns by ♕h7, but his queenside pawns are broken and Black has a passed a-pawn. This last factor might lead one to believe that Black would be better in any ending, but that isn't necessarily the case. The a3-bishop can blockade the a-pawn and if White is able to penetrate with a rook then Black could be in trouble. Thus the assessment of a liquidation depends heavily on the precise position afterwards, and therefore careful calculation is necessary to ensure that the result will be favourable.

21 ♘xc4 dxc4

Forced, since 21...♕xc4? 22 ♕h7 ♖g8 23 ♖xf7! ♕xc3+ 24 ♔e2 ♕xa1 (24...♖ae8 25 ♗xe7 ♕c4+ 26 ♔f3 ♕c3+ 27 ♔g4 ♕xd4+ 28 f4 also wins for White) 25 ♖xe7+ ♔c6 26 ♖xe6+ gives White a mating attack.

22 ♕h7 ♘f5?

This exchange sacrifice looks natural, as it seals in White's queen, but it allows White to force a favourable liquidation. 22...♖h8! 23 ♕xg7 ♕e4+ 24 ♖e3 ♕f5 is better. After 25 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 26 ♖f3 ♖ag8 27 ♕xh8 ♕e4+ 28 ♖e3 ♕xe3+ 29 fxe3 ♖xh8 an ending arises in which White is a pawn up, but in a pure rook ending the outside passed a-pawn is quite dangerous and should enable Black to draw.

23 d5!

The start of a tactical sequence forcing a favourable ending. Neither 23 ♗xf8? ♕e4+! 24 ♔d2 (24 ♔f1?? loses the queen to a knight check) 24...♖xf8 25 ♖a4 ♖c8 nor 23 ♖xf5? ♕e4+ 24 ♔d2 ♕xf5 25 ♕xf5 exf5 26 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 27 ♔e3 gives White any advantage.

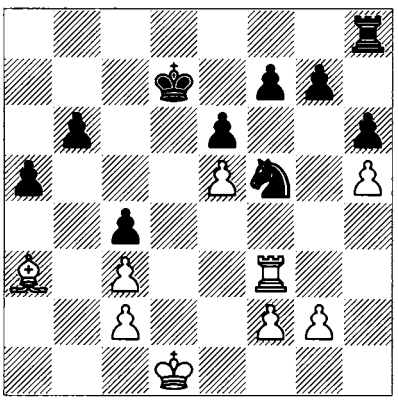
23...♕xd5

23...♕a4? loses to 24 ♖xf5 exf5 25 ♕xf5+ ♔e8 26 e6 with a winning attack.

24 ♖d1

Winning the queen, but White's own queen is trapped so this is simply an indirect way to exchange queens.

24...♕xd1+ 25 ♔xd1 ♖h8 26 ♕xh8 ♖xh8



White has given up a pawn to exchange queens, but now comes the payback since White can force the penetration of his rook.

27 g4 ♘h4 28 ♖xf7+ ♔c6 29 ♖xg7

The extra pawn and active pieces should be enough for White to win.

29...♔d5?!

This makes life simple for White. 29...♘f3 offers more resistance, but even here the precise continuation 30 ♔e2 ♘xe5 31 f4 ♘d7 32 ♖g6! ♔d5 33 f5 ♘c5 34 f6 a4 35 f7 ♖f8 36 ♖g7 ♔e5 37 g5! hxg5 38 h6 ♔f6 39 ♗c1 will win for White.

30 ♖f7

Keeping the knight out of f3, and leaving it in danger of being trapped.

30...♖g8 31 f3 ♘xf3

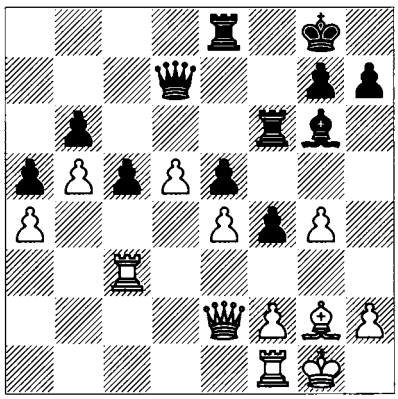
Desperation, but there was nothing better. Now White wins easily with the extra piece.

32 ♖xf3 ♖xg4 33 ♖f6 ♖g1+ 34 ♔d2 ♖g2+ 35 ♔c1 ♔xe5 36 ♖xh6 ♖h2 37 ♗e7! b5 38 ♔b2 ♔d5 39 ♖h8 e5 40 h6 ♔e6 41 h7 ♔f7 42 ♗d6 1-0

20 Using the Whole Board

When most of the action is taking place on one part of the board, it's easy to forget that the rest of the board exists.

B



Grishchuk – Ivanchuk
Amber Rapid, Monaco 2011

Black stands slightly better for two reasons. Firstly, the only area where there is any play is on the kingside, and there Black's advanced f-pawn gives him a space advantage, and secondly Black's bishop is more active. However, it's a long way from the current situation to a win.

28...♗f7 29 f3

White has good chances to defend, since Black can only attack on a narrow front.

29...g5 30 h4!?

White could run with his king to the queenside and just sit tight on the kingside, but he decides to defend dynamically by activating his bishop.

30...gxh4 31 ♗h3 ♖g6 32 ♔f2 h5 33 ♖h1 ♕e7

White must avoid gxh5, which would be met by ...♖g3, but equally Black would prefer not to play ...hxg4, since after ♗xg4 White's bishop becomes active and the h4-pawn will be weak.

34 ♖cc1 ♔h7 35 ♖cg1 ♖eg8

At the moment White has everything under control, since he is able to counter the plan of ...♗e8-d7 by doubling rooks on the h-file.

36 ♔f1?!

This wastes time. White can continue 36 ♖g2 ♗e8 (36...c4 can be met by 37 ♖c1) 37 ♕c4 (preventing any tricks based on ...c4) 37...♗d7 38 ♖gh2, when it is hard to see how Black can make progress since 38...hxg4 39 ♗xg4 ♖xg4 only leads to equality after 40 d6! ♕f6 41 ♕d5! ♖8g7 42 fxg4 ♖xg4 43 ♖h3 ♔g7 44 ♖1h2.

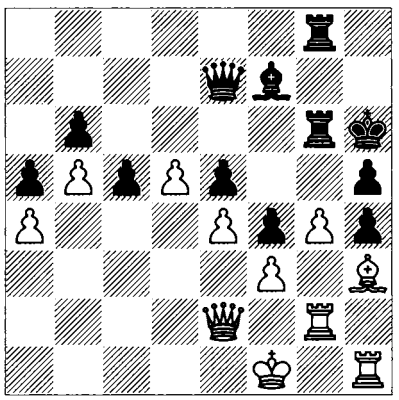
36...♔h6?!

Missing the chance to play 36...♗e8!, when White no longer has time to double rooks on the h-file since both 37 ♖g2 and 37 ♖h2 are strongly met by 37...c4!.

37 ♖g2?

The right idea, but the wrong execution. 37 ♖h2 is correct, since after 37...c4 38 ♕xc4 ♕a3 39 ♗g2! (this is why g2 has to be kept clear) 39...hxg4 40 ♖xh4+ ♔g7 41 ♖gh1! White has enough counterplay to ensure a draw.

B



37...c4!

With all the action on the kingside, it would have been easy for Grishchuk to forget about this possibility. By sacrificing a pawn, Black is able to penetrate with his queen to a3 and harass the white king from the queenside. Because his bishop is immobile, White is unable to reorganize his forces to meet this new attack.

38 ♕xc4 ♕a3 39 ♖f2?!

Allowing a forced win. The best chance is 39 ♕e2 but after 39...♕a1+ 40 ♕e1 ♕xa4 41 ♔g1 ♕xb5 42 ♕xh4 ♖g5 Black is a pawn up and has a clear advantage.

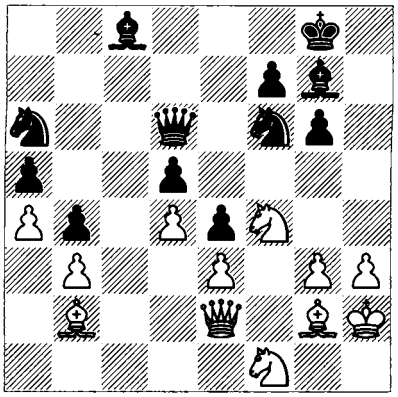
39...hxg4 40 ♗xg4 ♖xg4! 41 fxg4 ♖xg4

There's no defence to the many threats.

42 ♕e2 ♗h5 43 ♖f3 ♕c1+ 44 ♕e1 ♕c4+ 45 ♔f2 ♕c2+ 0-1

It's mate in a few moves.

W



Petrosian – Larsen
Santa Monica 1966

Black stands better for three main reasons. First of all, White has more pawn-islands than Black (see Section 73), and a consequence of this is that the g3-pawn is weak; secondly, Black controls more space and, finally, White's dark-squared bishop is bad and is likely to remain so in view of the largely fixed pawn-structure. However, it's not easy for Black to improve his position against careful defence and in order to do so he must use the whole board.

29 h4

To stop ...g5, but it weakens the g4-square.

29...♘c7 30 ♗h3 ♗xh3 31 ♘xh3 ♗f8

Heading to d6 to target the g3-pawn.

32 ♔g2 ♕c6 33 ♕d1 ♗d6 34 ♘f2 ♘e6 35 ♗c1

Starting a trip to e1 to reinforce the g3-square.

35...♘g7

The main area of attack is the kingside, and the main target g3. However, by keeping his queen on the c-file, Black not only prevents counterplay, but also forces White to cover c1 and c2 to prevent a penetration.

36 ♗d2 ♘f5 37 ♔h3 ♕c8 38 ♔g2?

Overlooking a tactical point. 38 ♕c1 is better.

38...♔g7?

Although Larsen had several minutes to spare before the time-control, he overlooked a forced win by 38...♘h5 39 ♘h1 ♘hxg3! 40 ♘hxg3 ♘xh4+ 41 ♔h2 ♘f3+ 42 ♔g2 ♘g5!, followed by ...♕h3+, with a decisive attack.

39 ♘h1?

39 ♕c1 was still the move.

39...♘h6

39...♗xg3! 40 ♘hxg3 ♘xh4+ 41 ♔h2 ♘f3+ 42 ♔g2 ♘g5 is another win based on the same idea.

40 ♗e1

Sacrifices don't work now that g3 is securely defended, and 'normal service' is resumed.

40...♕a6

The queen angles in from the a-file, while retaining control of the squares c6 and c8 on the c-file to prevent the white queen from becoming active.

41 ♘f2 ♘f5

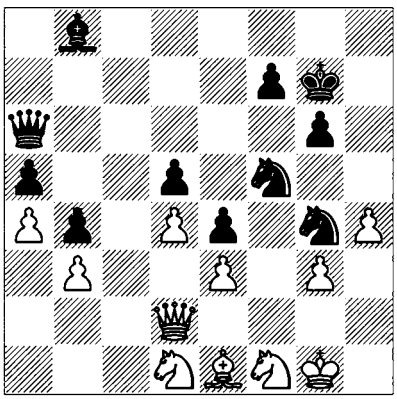
The threat is 42...♕xf1+.

42 ♕d2 ♗b8

So that White has to worry about ...♕d6. Although the main focus is the kingside, Black uses the whole board for his manoeuvres.

43 ♘d1 ♘g4 44 ♔g1

B



44...f6 45 ♔g2 g5 46 ♘f2 ♘gh6 47 hxg5

After 47 h5 g4 followed by ...♔f7 and ...♘g7 Black will win the h5-pawn.

47...fxg5 48 ♘d1 ♔g6 49 ♘h2 g4 50 ♕c2 ♗d6 51 ♘f1 ♘g8 52 ♘h2 ♘f6 53 ♘f1 ♔h5

53...♘h7! followed by ...♘g5-f3 wins more quickly, but Larsen's method is good enough.

54 ♘h2 ♔g5 55 ♘f1 ♘h5 56 ♗f2 ♘f6 57 ♗e1 ♘h5 58 ♗f2 ♕a8!

The final link in Black's plan, intending ...♕h8 followed by a sacrifice on g3. This manoeuvre emphasizes how effectively Black used the whole width of the board.

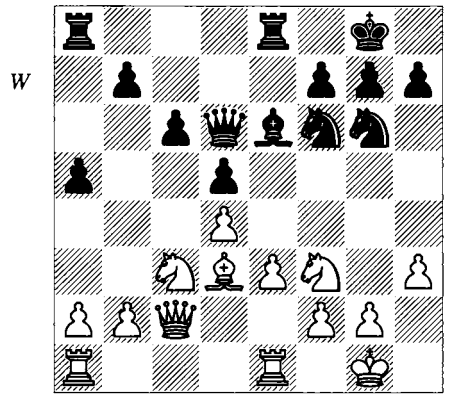
59 ♗e1 ♕h8 60 ♕c6 ♗xg3! 61 ♗xg3 ♘hxg3 0-1

After 62 ♘xg3 ♕h3+ 63 ♔f2 ♕xg3+ 64 ♔e2 ♕xe3+! Black will finish two pawns up.

21 The Minority Attack

Van Wely – Short
Wijk aan Zee 2010

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♘bd7 5 cxd5 exd5 6 ♗g5 c6 7 e3 ♗e7 8 ♕c2 0-0 9 ♗d3 ♖e8 10 h3 ♘f8 11 ♗f4 a5 12 0-0 ♘g6 13 ♗h2 ♗d6 14 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 15 ♖fe1 ♗e6



In positions with this type of Queen's Gambit pawn-structure, White normally has only two possible plans: he can either play for the central break e4, or he can play a3, ♖ab1 and b4-b5. Here playing e4 achieves nothing apart from giving White an isolated d-pawn, so the balance lies firmly in favour of a queenside advance. Such an advance is called a **minority attack** because it involves advancing White's two queenside pawns against Black's three. Black sometimes meets this plan by generating kingside counterplay, but here this is difficult as the dark-squared bishops have been exchanged.

16 a3 ♖e7 17 ♖ab1 ♖ae8 18 b4 axb4 19 axb4 ♗d7 20 b5

The point of White's pawn advance is to leave Black with a weak queenside pawn; if Black takes on b5 then he has isolated b- and d-pawns, while allowing the exchange bxc6 bxc6 will give Black a backward c-pawn.

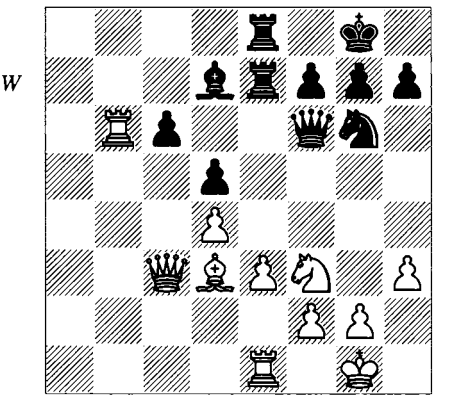
20...♘e4

It's sometimes possible for Black to meet b5 with ...c5, but here 20...c5 21 dxc5 ♕xc5 22 ♖ec1 ♖c8 23 ♕b2 ♕d6 24 ♘a4 followed by ♕d4 leaves White with a clear advantage.

21 bxc6 bxc6 22 ♖b6

Black is not only left with a weak pawn, but in addition White's pieces are very active. By contrast, Black's bishop is passively placed.

22...♘xc3 23 ♕xc3 ♕f6



Black has no counterplay and is reduced to the grim defence of a position with few active prospects. The threat of ...♗xh3 is a pinprick which causes White no real inconvenience.

24 ♗xg6

The exchange of this knight eliminates Black's last prospect of serious kingside play.

24...♕xg6

24...hxg6 25 ♘e5 ♖c8 26 ♕c5 is terrible for Black.

25 ♔f1

Sidestepping the trap 25 ♘e5?? ♖xe5 26 dxe5 ♗xh3, when Black wins.

25...f6

Black has managed to keep the knight out of e5, but c5 is another tempting outpost.

26 ♖a1 ♕h5 27 ♘e1 ♕f5

Another one-move threat by Black, but his play runs out once White's king reaches h2.

28 ♔g1 ♕g5 29 ♔h2 ♕f5

Now Black is obliged to fall back into passive defence.

30 ♘d3 ♕e6 31 ♔g1 ♖c8 32 ♖b7 ♖f7 33 ♖aa7 ♗e8 34 ♕b4 ♖d8 35 ♘c5 ♕c8 36 ♕b6 h5 37 ♖c7 ♖xc7 38 ♖xc7 ♕a8 39 ♖a7 ♕c8 40 ♖b7 ♗f7 41 ♕a7 ♖f8 42 ♘d7

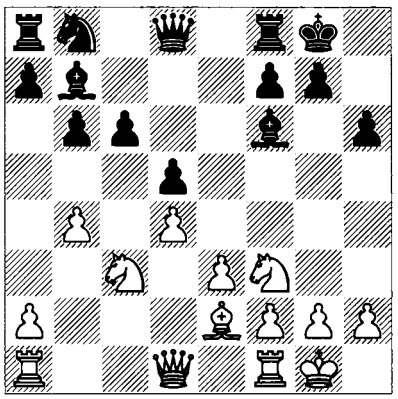
At last material loss is unavoidable.

42...♖e8 43 ♘xf6+ gxf6 44 ♖xf7 ♕f5 45 ♖g7+ ♔h8 46 ♕f7 1-0

Timman – Short

Candidates (3), El Escorial 1993

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗e7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♘f3 h6 7 ♗h4 b6 8 ♗e2 ♗b7 9 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 0-0 c6 12 b4



The minority attack isn't a guarantee of success and Black has various methods of countering it. One is to meet b4 with ...b5 followed by playing a knight to b6 and c4; another, which is used in this game, is to arrange to meet b5 with ...c5.

12...♖e8 13 ♕b3 a5

Black even encourages White to push his b-pawn.

14 b5?!

14 bxa5 ♖xa5 15 a4 is better, when White has some pressure along the b- and c-files.

14...c5 15 dxc5 bxc5 16 ♖ac1 ♗xc3?!

16...a4! is the simplest method of demonstrating that White has achieved nothing from the opening. After 17 ♘xa4 c4 18 ♕c2 ♘d7 19 ♘c3 ♖a3 20 ♕d2 ♘c5 21 ♘d4 ♕a5, with ...♘e6 to come, Black has full compensation for the pawn.

17 ♕xc3 ♘d7 18 ♖fd1

Timman played 18 ♖c2 in the first game of the match, but after 18...♕b6 19 ♖d1 ♖e7 20 h3 ♖ae8 Black had equalized.

18...♕b6

The minority attack has produced no concrete benefit for White. Black, it is true, has hanging pawns in the centre (see Section 69), but these can just as easily be strong as weak.

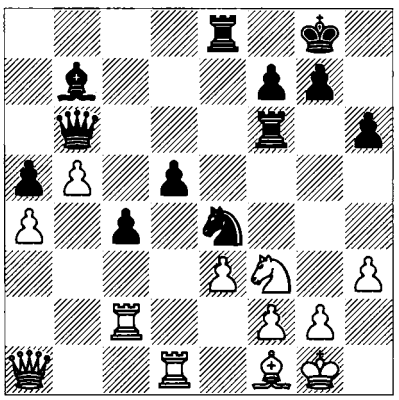
19 ♗f1 ♖ac8 20 h3 ♘f6 21 ♘d2 c4!?

Dynamic play by Black. He weakens d4, but restricts White's bishop and opens a diagonal for his queen. Objectively it is no stronger than other moves, but it presents White with tricky problems to solve.

22 a4 ♖e6 23 ♖c2 ♖ce8 24 ♘f3?!

Taking aim at d4 appears logical, but it allows Black to develop dangerous piece activity. 24 ♘b1 is better, intending ♕d4 followed by ♘c3.

24...♘e4 25 ♕a1 ♖f6



26 ♖d4?

This second error allows Black to break open White's kingside and exploit the undefended rook on c2. 26 ♘d4 is more logical, although even here 26...♗c8 followed by ...♖g6 gives Black good play on the kingside.

26...♖xf3! 27 gxf3 ♕g6+ 28 ♗g2

Forced, as 28 ♔h1 ♘g3+ 29 fxg3 ♕xc2 and 28 ♔h2 ♘g5 29 ♕d1 ♘xf3+ 30 ♕xf3 ♕xc2 are hopeless for White.

28...♘g5 29 ♖c1 ♘xf3+ 30 ♔f1

30 ♔h1 ♘xd4 31 ♕xd4 ♕g5 32 ♕a7 ♕e7 also favours Black, although White has a few drawing chances.

30...♘h2+ 31 ♔g1 ♘f3+ 32 ♔f1 ♘xd4 33 ♕xd4 ♕f5

Black has an extra pawn, but his bad bishop means he still has some work to do to exploit it.

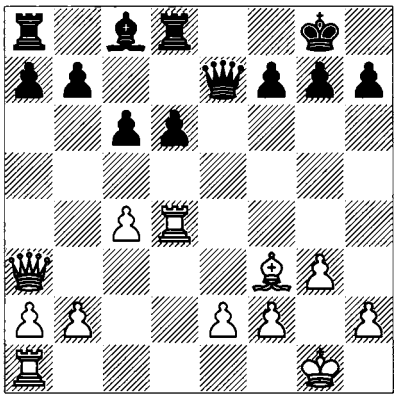
34 ♔g1 ♖e5! 35 ♕a7 ♕c8 36 ♔f1

36 ♕xa5 ♖g5 37 ♔f1 d4! 38 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 39 ♖xc4 ♕g2+ 40 ♔e2 d3+! gives Black a winning attack.

36...♖g5 37 ♕d4 ♕f5 38 f4 ♖g6 39 ♔f2 ♔h7 40 ♖d1 ♕c2+ 41 ♖d2 ♕xa4 42 b6 ♕b4 43 ♖b2 ♕e7 44 ♖a2 ♕h4+ 0-1

22 Inferior Positions

B



P.H. Nielsen – Caruana
Amsterdam 2010

Black stands worse thanks to his weak d6-pawn, which White can easily attack via the half-open d-file. White also controls more space, although this is not very significant as several minor pieces have already been exchanged. It's easy to lose a position such as this, since Black has no obvious counterplay. Caruana, however, saved the game using two basic ideas that apply to many inferior positions: finding counterplay, and reducing the pressure by liquidation.

20...♗e6

Developing a piece and attacking the c4-pawn, so that even if White plays ♖ad1 he will not immediately be threatening to win a pawn.

21 b3

Unavoidable sooner or later, since otherwise White will never be threatening to take on d6.

21...a5!

The start of an excellent defensive plan. Black will meet ♖ad1 with ...c5, allowing him to defend the d-pawn by ...♖a6, while the advance of the pawn to a4 will not only reduce the material on the board, but also open the a-file for possible later counterplay. Moves such as this may not get the same plaudits as brilliant sacrifices, but they are just as instructive.

22 ♖ad1 c5

Making the d-pawn permanently backward may look dreadful, but it's the only way to avoid losing a pawn. A single weakness is usually not fatal in itself, but Black must ensure that White is not given the time to improve his position and provoke another weakness somewhere else on the board.

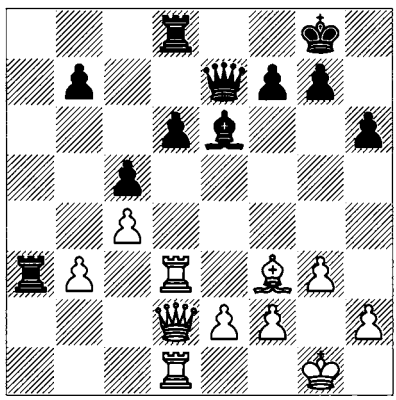
23 ♖4d3 a4 24 ♕c1

For the moment White cannot make progress since the d-pawn can be attacked three times and defended three times. The only chance for White to increase his advantage is on the kingside, but preparing any kind of pawn advance there is clearly going to take some time.

24...h6 25 ♕d2 axb3 26 axb3 ♖a3

Black makes use of the open a-file to counter-attack the b3-pawn.

W



27 ♕b2

Expelling the rook from a3, but relieving some of the pressure from d6. It's evident that White is unable to force Black into the type of totally passive position necessary to give him time to make progress on the kingside.

27...♖a6 28 h4 ♖b8!

Another fine defensive move. The pressure is momentarily off d6, so Black takes the chance to force through ...b5.

29 ♕d2 b5

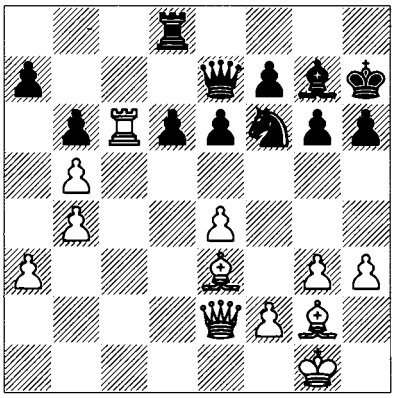
Black has fully equalized since exchanging on b5 leaves the b3-pawn just as weak as the one on d6.

30 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 31 ♕xd6 ♕xd6 32 ♖xd6 bxc4 33 bxc4 ♗xc4 34 ♖c6 ♖e8!

The final finesse. 34...♖b5?! leaves Black's rook in a passive position and allows White to play on by 35 ♖c8+ ♔h7 36 ♗e4+ g6 37 h5.

35 ♖xc5 ♗xe2 36 ♗xe2 ♖xe2 37 ♔f1 ½-½

B



Carlsen – Gashimov
Baku 2008

This position is very unattractive for Black. White has the two bishops in an open position, a splendid outpost for his rook on c6 and a ready-made plan of a4-a5 to break open Black's queenside. As always, the defender should look for any elements of the position that favour him. Here there's only one: using his central pawn-majority he may be able to create a passed pawn by ...d5.

22...♘e8!

The immediate 22...d5? is bad due to 23 e5 ♘e8 24 ♗d4, blockading the d-pawn and sealing Black's minor pieces out of the game. By removing the knight, Black prevents the reply e5 and so threatens ...d5. If White is given a couple of spare tempi, he will increase his advantage by pushing the a-pawn, so it's essential to keep him off-balance.

23 ♗d2?!

The right idea, opening the e-file in order to prevent ...d5 due to the pin after exd5, but an inaccurate execution. 23 ♗c1! is better, so as to meet 23...♗d4 with 24 ♕d2 ♗g7 25 a4, gaining time.

23...♗d4!

Black displays another important defensive attribute: flexibility. Having persuaded the white bishop to abandon the g1-a7 diagonal, Black occupies it with his own bishop, securing it by ...e5 if necessary. This greatly reduces the impact of White's a4-a5, since b6 is now firmly defended. White can of course exchange dark-squared bishops, but this leaves him with an inactive g2-bishop blocked in by the e4-pawn.

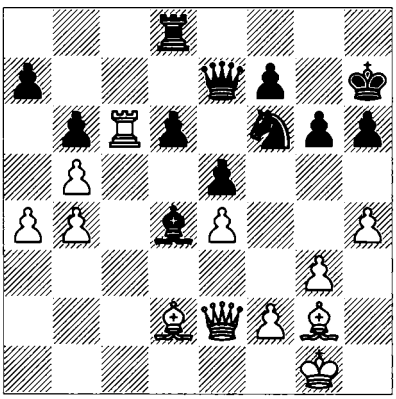
24 a4 e5 25 h4

White achieves nothing after 25 a5 ♘c7 followed by ...♘e6, so he toys with the idea of weakening Black's kingside by h5.

25...♘f6

25...♘c7 26 h5 followed by ♗h3 gives White some kingside pressure, so Black takes immediate steps to rule out the further advance of White's h-pawn.

W



26 ♗f3 ♕e6?!

Black plays to prevent h5, but pins his own d-pawn and thus rules out counterplay by ...d5. The simplest solution is 26...d5! 27 exd5 e4 followed by ...♖xd5, when Black's active pieces ensure equality.

27 ♔g2

27 h5 gxh5 28 ♗xh5? fails to 28...♕h3!, but 27 ♗e3! ♗xe3 28 ♕xe3 gives White some advantage, as a5 cannot now be prevented.

27...♖d7 28 ♕c4

28 ♗e3 ♗xe3 29 ♕xe3 ♕a2 is now OK for Black, since a7 is defended after 30 a5 bxa5.

28...♕xc4 29 ♖xc4

The ending promises White little as the d4-bishop is such a useful defensive piece.

29...♔g7 30 ♗c1 h5 31 ♗g5 ♘h7 32 ♗d2 ♘f6 33 ♖c6 ♘g4 34 ♗e1 ♘f6 35 a5

White finally makes this advance, but Black counters it easily.

35...d5 36 exd5 ♘xd5 37 ♗d2 ♘e7 38 ♗g5!?

A neat try, but it doesn't disturb the balance.

38...♘xc6 39 bxc6 ♖c7 40 ♗d8 ♖c8 41 c7 e4! 42 ♗xe4 ♗e5 43 ♗b7 ♖xc7 44 ♗xc7 ♗xc7 45 a6 b5 46 ♗c6 ♗d6 47 ♗xb5 ½-½

Activity

The terms **active** and **passive** can apply either to a single piece, or to the whole position. An **active position** refers to one that offers many possibilities for improvement and which is capable of generating threats, either strategic or tactical, which will cause problems for the opponent. A **passive position** is one that offers little in the way of constructive plans, and in which the player is restricted to a defensive stance. Positions may become passive for a wide range of reasons, from inferior pawn-structure to poor piece coordination, but whatever the cause, a passive position can be a serious problem. Tomashevsky-Khairullin (page 72) is a typical example in which a slip involving a knight retreat allowed White to force Black into a passive position. White steadily increased the pressure and achieved a winning position.

It's easy to fall into a passive frame of mind if your opponent makes a sacrifice and you believe that all you have to do is hang on to the extra material. This is often wrong since passive play may allow him time to secure further compensation for the sacrifice, and in many cases the best response to a sacrifice is to fight even more vigorously for activity, even if this involves a counter-sacrifice. Berndt-Nielsen (page 73) is an excellent example of this strategy.

The **initiative** is another rather abstract concept, and means being able to create direct threats which keep the opponent off-balance. A player with the initiative is able to improve his position with gain of time, since he can make one threat after another, often activating his pieces in the process, while his opponent is reduced to purely defensive measures. Adams-Howell (page 74) is a good example, in which a well-judged pawn sacrifice by Adams led to a growing attack which quickly developed its own momentum. McShane-Carlsen (page 75) shows that the initiative doesn't have to lead be based on an attack on the enemy king. Here Black was kept off-balance by a barrage of threats from White, culminating in the gain of an important pawn.

One of the key factors in the middlegame is the activity of individual pieces. Many of the traditional middlegame themes, such as outposts and bad bishops, are simply special cases of the general principle that active pieces are better than passive ones. Each piece has its own characteristics; the activity of rooks, for example, often depends on the possibility of controlling an open file. Topalov-Anand (page 76) shows how doubled rooks on an open file can prove decisive all by themselves. In this case the rook activity led quickly to decisive threats, but even if there is no immediate win, control of an open file can provide an unbreakable grip on the enemy position which sooner or later leads to material gain. Mista-Gdanski (page 77) is an example.

Occupation of an open file often leads to a rook arriving on the seventh rank. The rook on the seventh is often regarded as an endgame theme, but it often proves equally effective in the middlegame. Just as in an endgame, such a rook attacks unmoved pawns on the opponent's second rank and if the pawns move forward they can become weak, as in Shirov-Sumets (page 78). Unlike the corresponding endgame situation, a rook on the seventh in the middlegame can often contribute towards a direct attack on the king. In Svetushkin-Baklan (page 79), the black rook on e2 cooperated with other pieces to exert intolerable pressure on White's kingside.

Outposts are squares in advanced positions from which a piece cannot be expelled by enemy pawns. Knights are especially effective at exploiting outposts, as we can see in Leko-Navara (page 80). If an outpost doesn't currently exist, it may be possible to create one. Kasimdzhanov-Megaranto (page 81) shows how this can happen, with White executing a plan that involved the formation and occupation of an outpost on d6.

The power of a knight occupying an advanced outpost is such a common theme that it's worth looking at some further examples. A knight on a sixth-rank outpost very often confers a decisive advantage and indeed it may be worth offering material in order to establish one. In Azarov-Socko (page 82), White sacrificed a piece for two pawns and a knight on the sixth, which provided more

than enough compensation. Svidler-Berg (page 83) features a familiar scenario – a white knight established on d5 in the Sicilian. The fact that this is such a familiar motif doesn't make it any less effective, although this case is slightly unusual in that White was prepared to sacrifice a pawn in order to get his knight to the key square.

A single badly-placed piece can poison a whole position. A typical example is a black knight on a5 held offside by a white pawn on d5, a situation that can arise in a variety of openings, such as the Closed Ruy Lopez and the King's Indian. In these openings it's advisable to retrieve the knight as quickly as possible, but if in the meantime some action takes place on the kingside, Black may be effectively a piece down, as in Malakhatko-Ovechkin (page 84). It's not only knights which may find themselves misplaced, and in Grishchuk-Gelfand (page 85) an offside bishop leads to Black's defeat.

A **bad bishop** is one that is obstructed by its own pawns, while a **good bishop** is one which is not so obstructed. Take a look at the starting position of Elianov-Malakhov (page 86). White has a large pawn-chain stretching from c5 to g5 in which all the pawns are fixed on dark squares. This seriously obstructs the bishop on d2, which is destined to play a very minor role for the rest of the game. Nijboer-Yakovenko (page 87) is a less extreme example which demonstrates that even a couple of pawns stuck on the same-coloured squares as the bishop can prove a major handicap.

It's useful to remember that there are exceptions to every chess principle and it sometimes happens that a theoretically bad bishop can prove effective. If the side with the bad bishop has a large space advantage, as in Radjabov-Elianov (page 88), then the bishop may not be limited as it still has plenty of room to move around. Another exception arises when a bad bishop is outside its pawn-chain and especially if it can exploit some weak squares. Kuzubov-Ulybin (page 89) is an example.

In order to exploit an advantage, it's often necessary to open lines to allow one's own pieces to develop maximum activity and target the weak points in the enemy position. The standard method of opening lines is to use a pawn advance, and Brynell-Wedberg (page 90) shows that it may be worth sacrificing a pawn to blast open the enemy's defences. In Ivanchuk-Bareev (page 91), White opened lines by combining a pawn advance with a sacrifice.

Giving up a pawn involves a rather modest material sacrifice, and it's not unusual to offer a pawn in return for piece activity. In the opening, such a sacrifice is often termed a **gambit**, and Krivoruchko-Smirin (page 92) is a good example of how a well-judged gambit can allow a player to increase his lead in development and develop great piece activity. In So-Navara (page 93), White's pawn sacrifice serves not only to activate his pieces but also to damage the enemy pawn-structure. In this example, the compensation is unusually long-term and only reaps its reward 20 moves later.

Sometimes a single pawn blocks in one's pieces and prevents them from developing activity. If this pawn can be advanced, then the latent power of the confined pieces may be released. We call such pawn pushes **liberating moves**. In Grishchuk-Gelfand (page 94), the whole game revolves around whether Black can play the liberating move ...e5. Once Black achieves this, his problems are over. It may even be worth sacrificing a pawn to force through a liberating move. Ikonnikov-Maiwald (page 95) provides a good example, since the surprising pawn sacrifice ...d5 freed Black's imprisoned bishop and turned the tables.

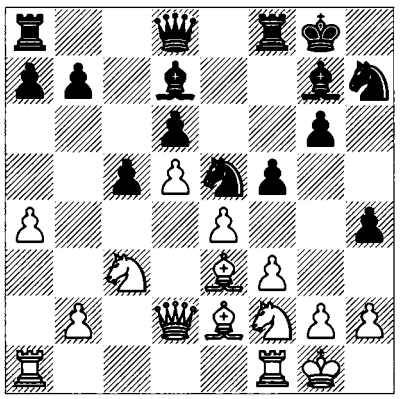
We have already discussed a couple of situations in which a sacrifice can be used to develop piece activity, but such sacrifices are not restricted to these special cases. Positional exchange sacrifices are especially common, and are typically used to eliminate an important enemy minor piece. They tend to be more effective if there are no open files, although sometimes a single open file is acceptable if the enemy rooks cannot penetrate along it. That's the case in Van Wely-Topalov (page 96), in which further compensation was afforded by White's awkward king position. Almasi-Erdos (page 97) is an interesting case because the compensation did not include any threats against the enemy king, but was solely a matter of positional factors, such as piece activity and a passed pawn.

The range of possible positional sacrifices is great, and I can't do more than give a sample of the possibilities. In Lopez Martinez-del Rio (page 98), Black made a succession of positional sacrifices, ending up with just two minor pieces for a queen, while in Anand-Wang Hao (page 99) White gave up a piece for two pawns, but secured a dangerous mobile pawn-mass.

23 The Curse of Passivity

Much middlegame play is based on activity. This refers not only to the activity of individual pieces, but also to the activity of the position as a whole and its potential to undertake positive action. If a position is passive and offers no constructive plan, then the opponent will be free to manoeuvre as he likes, and sooner or later he will find a way to make progress.

B



Tomashevsky – Khairullin
European Ch, Rijeka 2010

In this position from the King's Indian, Black's strategy is based on piece activity while White puts his faith in his extra central pawn and solid position. The main risk for Black is that if his activity leads to nothing, he will fall into a passive and strategically inferior position.

16...♕f6

16...a6 17 ♔h1 ♖e8 18 ♖g1!, with the idea of g4, favours White.

17 exf5 gxf5 18 ♘h3

A key move, preventing ...f4.

18...♘g6?

After this, Black falls into a passive position. 18...♖ae8 is the most flexible plan, keeping the knight on the more active square e5. In this case White has only a slight advantage.

19 f4!

Black was threatening ...f4, so this is the most natural move in any case, but it also severely limits Black's minor pieces. His knights and d7-bishop are now blocked in and it doesn't take long to see that he lacks any positive plan. Note that if Black had left his knight on e5 then White could not have played f4 due to the reply ...♘g4.

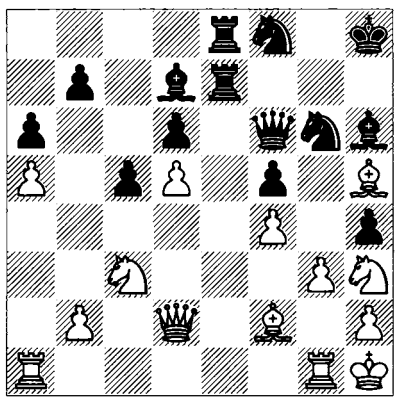
19...a6 20 ♗f2 ♖ae8 21 ♔h1!

When the opponent has been reduced to passivity, there's almost always some way to make progress. Here White intends an eventual ♖g1 and g3, with a direct attack along the g-file.

21...♖f7 22 a5 ♖fe7 23 ♗h5 ♘hf8 24 ♖g1! ♗h6 25 g3 ♔h8?!

Now White has total command of the g-file, but even the best defence, 25...hxg3 26 ♖xg3 ♖g7, leaves Black under tremendous pressure after 27 ♖ag1 ♖ee7 28 ♘g5 ♗e8 29 h4 (note that 29...♘xh4? loses to 30 ♗xe8 ♖xe8 31 ♖h3).

W



26 gxh4 ♘xh4 27 ♗xe8?

A serious error allowing Black a single chance to escape. 27 b4! is the killing move, opening a second front on the queenside. After 27...♗g7 28 bxc5 ♕xc3 29 ♕xc3 ♗xc3 30 ♗xh4 ♗xa1 31 ♖xa1 Black's position collapses.

27...♗xe8?

27...♘f3! is the saving move since after 28 ♕d3 ♘xg1 29 ♗xd7 ♘xh3 30 ♕xh3 ♖xd7 31 ♗h4 ♕g6 32 ♖g1 ♕h7 White has at most a slight edge.

28 ♘g5

Now White is back on track and wins convincingly enough.

28...♘hg6 29 ♖ae1 ♖xe1 30 ♖xe1 ♗f7 31 ♘xf7+ ♕xf7 32 ♗g3 ♗g7 33 ♕e3 ♗d4 34 ♕f3 ♔g8 35 ♖e2 ♕h7 36 ♘a4 ♕d7 37 ♘b6 ♕b5 38 h4 ♕xa5 39 ♘c4 ♕d8 40 h5 ♘h8 41 ♖g2 ♔f7 42 ♕d3 1-0

Players often think passively when their opponent has sacrificed something. The logic is that with extra material in hand, it's only necessary to defend grimly and the material will win out in the end. But many positions are not like this. Responding passively to a sacrifice often only allows the opponent to improve his position and increase his compensation. This applies especially to positional sacrifices. In many cases the way to disrupt the enemy build-up is to play aggressively yourself, even if this involves a counter-sacrifice. Thinking actively is just as important when material up as in any other situation.

Berndt – P.H. Nielsen
Bundesliga 2005/6

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗b3 ♘bd7 8 ♕e2 b5 9 ♗g5 ♗b7 10 0-0-0 ♖c8 11 ♖he1 ♖xc3!? 12 bxc3 ♕a5 13 f3 b4?!

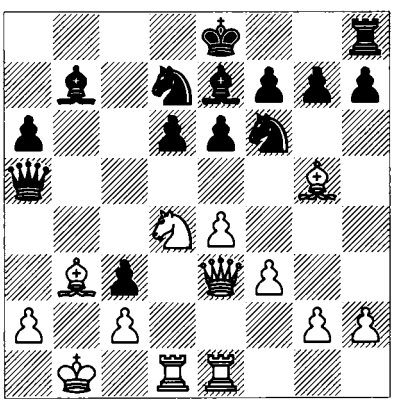
A natural move, exploiting the undefended bishop on g5 to win the c3-pawn. However, 13...d5! is better since after 14 exd5 ♗a3+ 15 ♔b1 ♘xd5 16 ♘xb5! axb5 17 ♗xd5 ♕xc3 18 ♗c1 ♗xc1 19 ♔xc1 ♕a1+ 20 ♔d2 ♕d4+ 21 ♔c1 the complications peter out to a draw.

14 ♕e3 bxc3 15 ♔b1

For the moment Black's attack is not dangerous, since ...♕a3 can be met by ♕xc3, but if Black is allowed to complete his development by ...♗e7, ...0-0 and ...♖b8 then he will have excellent compensation for the exchange. It is essential for White to prevent this.

15...♗e7

W



16 ♘f5!

The key move. By sacrificing a piece, White takes over the initiative and avoids falling into a passive position.

16...exf5 17 exf5 ♘e5 18 f4 ♘c6

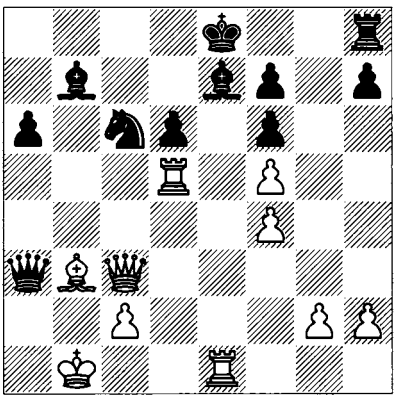
The best defence. 18...0-0? loses to 19 fxe5 ♘g4 20 ♕d4! ♗xg5 21 ♕xd6 followed by e6.

19 ♗xf6 gxf6 20 ♖d5 ♕b4?

This allows White to increase his initiative. 20...♕c7 21 ♕xc3 ♔d7 is a better defence, although after 22 ♖dd1 ♕b6 23 ♔a1 White retains some advantage thanks to his active pieces and Black's awkward king position. Note how even after Black's best defence, White's sacrifice has transformed the position. Instead of defending against Black's queenside threats, White has seized the initiative and it is Black who is under pressure.

21 a3! ♕xa3 22 ♕xc3

B



Black is in trouble because his queen is now sidelined.

22...♔f8?

22...♕b4 was the last chance, but after 23 ♕xb4 ♘xb4 24 ♖xd6 ♗xg2 (24...♘c6 25 ♖xf6 0-0 26 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 27 ♖xe7 ♗xg2 28 f6 wins for White) 25 c3 ♘c6 26 ♗a4 0-0 27 ♖d2 ♗h3 28 ♗xc6 White should win in the long run.

23 ♖e4!

With the decisive threat of ♖a4, which forces Black to surrender material.

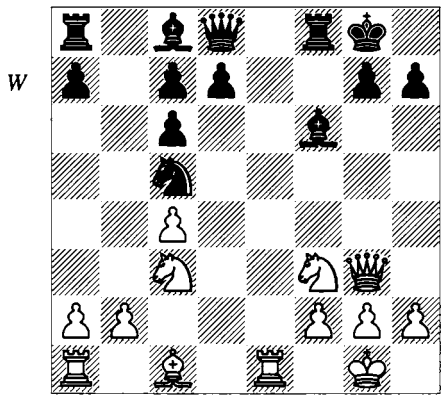
23...♘e5 24 fxe5 dxe5

24...♗xd5 loses to 25 ♕c8+ ♔g7 26 ♖g4+ ♔h6 27 ♕c3 with a quick mate.

25 ♕c7 ♗xd5 26 ♕c8+ ♔g7 27 ♖g4+ ♔h6 28 ♕c3! 1-0

24 The Initiative

In chess, 'having the initiative' means possessing the ability to create threats that keep the opponent off-balance. The ability to generate threats at will is very uncomfortable for the opponent, since every move he has to calculate the consequences of executing those threats. By piling one threat on top of another, the player with the initiative can improve the position of his pieces with gain of time. In the following game, Adams used this technique to launch a deadly attack on the king.



Adams – D. Howell
London 2010

14 ♗g5

Developing a piece and preparing to exchange off the active bishop on f6.

14...♘d3?

14...d6 is sounder.

15 ♖e3!

The key moment. By sacrificing the b-pawn, White is able to seize the initiative and keep it for the rest of the game. By contrast, 15 ♖e2?! ♗xg5 16 ♘xg5 ♘f4 17 ♖e3 d5 gives Black a satisfactory position.

15...♘xb2

15...♗xg5 16 ♘xg5 ♘f4 is no longer effective because after 17 ♖f3 ♕f6 18 ♖e1 Black has to respond to the threat of ♖e4.

16 ♖ae1

The only defect of Black's position is the undeveloped c8-bishop. By continually making threats, White denies Black the chance to develop this bishop effectively. Black faces the immediate problem of countering White's threats of 17 ♖e7! ♗xe7 18 ♖xe7, with a deadly attack against g7, or simply 17 ♘e4.

16...♗xg5

16...♗a6 is bad because after 17 ♖e7 ♗xc3 18 ♖1e3 ♘d1 19 ♘e5 ♕xe7 20 ♗xe7 ♘xe3 21 ♗xf8 ♗xe5 22 ♕xe5 ♖xf8 23 ♕xe3 ♗xc4 24 ♕xa7 the passed a-pawn will be decisive.

17 ♘xg5

Again threatening ♖e7.

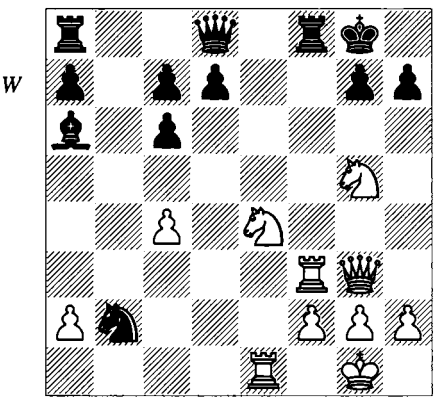
17...♕f6 18 ♖f3 ♕d8

The queen has to backtrack since 18...♕d6 loses to 19 ♕h4 h6 20 ♘f7! ♖xf7 21 ♖e8+.

19 ♘ce4

Black now has to meet the possibility of 20 ♘f6+ ♖xf6 21 ♖xf6, amongst other threats.

19...♗a6



Now the a8-rook can defend e8, but the bishop still displays no real activity.

20 ♘xh7!

White has gained so much time that he can launch a sacrificial assault on Black's king.

20...♖xf3

After 20...♔xh7 21 ♘g5+ ♔g8 22 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8 23 ♕h3 White mates quickly.

21 gxf3 ♔xh7 22 ♘g5+ ♔g8 23 ♕h4 ♗xc4

At last the bishop enters the game, but it's too late since White's attack is already decisive.

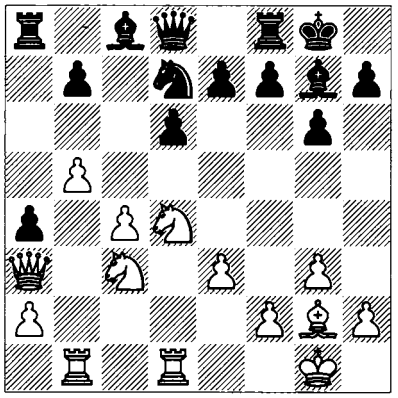
24 ♕h7+ ♔f8 25 ♖e5

Threatening 26 ♖f5+.

25...♗e6 26 ♕h8+ ♔e7 27 ♕xg7+ ♔d6

Or 27...♔e8 28 ♕f7#.

28 ♘e4# (1-0)



McShane – Carlsen
London 2010

It's important to note that the initiative can be exploited in ways other than an attack on the king. For example, the continual pressure may eventually lead to a gain of material. In this position, White has a lead in development and actively-placed pieces, while Black has the two bishops and a possible strong square for his knight on c5. In order to keep Black from consolidating and completing his development, White must operate with immediate threats.

17 ♘e4

Preventing ...♘c5 and threatening to open the position up by 18 c5.

17...♕b6

17...♕a5 is safer. While the text-move is not bad if followed up correctly, it's risky to place the queen opposite the b1-rook.

18 ♘c6! ♖e8?!

Too passive; 18...bxc6 19 bxc6 ♕a5 20 cxd7 ♗xd7 21 c5 ♗g4 22 ♖dc1 dxc5 23 ♖xc5 ♕a6 is better. White has an edge due to his active rooks but Black's bishops give him counterchances.

19 ♘b4

Threatening ♘d5 followed by c5, so Black takes action to expel the knight from e4 even though he weakens his position in the process.

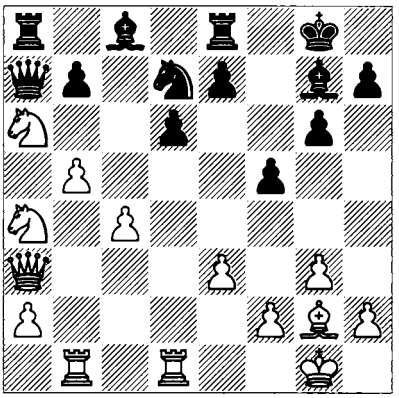
19...f5 20 ♘c3 ♕c5?!

This allows White to expand his initiative and results in serious problems for Black. 20...e6 21 ♘d3 ♘c5 is a better chance, although White retains considerable pressure.

21 ♘xa4!

A well-judged move, triggering some tactics which keep Black occupied for several moves.

21...♕a7 22 ♘a6



This is forced to avoid losing a piece, but also puts pressure on Black due to the threat of 23 ♘c7.

22...bxa6 23 b6 ♘xb6

After 23...♕b8 24 ♕b3 ♔h8 25 ♗xa8 ♕xa8 26 b7 White wins material, so Black must return the piece at once.

24 ♖xb6 ♖b8 25 c5

Typical initiative play: White introduces a new threat of 26 ♕b3+ and so forces Black's reply.

25...♗e6 26 ♖db1

Now the threats are 27 ♖b7 and 27 cxd6.

26...dxc5 27 ♖b7 ♖xb7 28 ♖xb7 ♕a8 29 ♘xc5 ♕c8

29...♗f7 loses two pawns after 30 ♖xe7, so this is forced.

30 ♕xa6

White has won a pawn but, importantly, his initiative persists and this greatly simplifies what would otherwise have been a tough technical task.

30...♗f7 31 ♗c6 ♖d8 32 ♘d7

White's pieces are a picture of activity. The main threat is 33 ♕b6 followed by ♖c7, trapping the queen. Black's bishops are shut away on the kingside and cannot influence the play in the top-left corner.

32...♖xd7

Acquiescing to further material loss, but the position was hopeless in any case.

33 ♗xd7 ♕c1+ 34 ♕f1 ♕xf1+ 35 ♔xf1 ♗c4+ 36 ♔g1 ♗xa2 37 ♗a4 e5 38 f3 ♗h6 39 ♗b3+ 1-0

25 Open Files

Topalov – Anand
Bilbao 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 g3 ♗a6 5 ♕c2 ♗b7 6 ♗g2 c5 7 d5!?

This pawn sacrifice has caused Black quite a few problems.

7...exd5 8 cxd5 ♘xd5 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♖d1 ♕c8 11 a3 ♘f6?!

Theory has developed since this game was played and 11...♘c7 is now regarded as sounder.

12 ♗g5 d5

After this White definitely secures some advantage. 12...0-0 13 ♘c3 ♖d8 is the most popular line, although even here 14 ♘h4 gives White good compensation for the pawn.

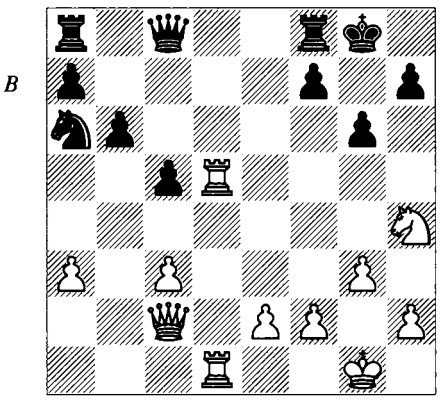
13 ♗xf6!

White plays to regain his pawn on d5, at the same time securing control of the open d-file.

13...♗xf6 14 ♘c3 ♗xc3 15 bxc3 ♘a6 16 ♘h4 g6

Black cannot hold on to the pawn by 16...♕e6 17 ♘f5 0-0 since 18 c4 regains the pawn under even more favourable circumstances.

17 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 18 ♖xd5 0-0 19 ♖ad1



Material equality is restored, but White's control of the d-file gives him a clear advantage.

19...♘c7

Transferring the knight to e6 gives Black some hope of an eventual ...♖d8.

20 ♖d7 ♘e6 21 ♕e4 ♕e8?

21...♖d8? is impossible due to 22 ♖xd8+ ♘xd8 23 ♕e8+ ♔g7 24 ♖d7. Moving the queen to e8 threatens to neutralize White's advantage by playing the other rook to d8. However, it is too slow. Black had two better ideas:

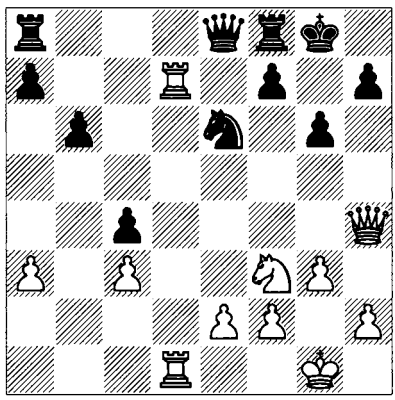
1) 21...c4 22 ♕f3 ♕c5 23 ♘g2 ♖ae8 (after 23...♕xa3 24 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 25 ♕xa8+ ♘f8 26 ♕d5 ♕xc3 27 ♘e3 White picks up the c4-pawn, after which Black's exposed king gives White a definite advantage) 24 ♘e3 ♘g5 25 ♕d5 ♕xd5 26 ♖1xd5 ♘e4 27 ♖d4 ♘xc3 28 ♖xc4 ♖c8 and White has only a slight endgame advantage.

2) 21...♘d4 22 ♕e7 ♘c6 23 ♘f5 ♘xe7 (23...gxf5? 24 ♕g5+ ♔h8 25 ♖1d5 gives White a winning attack) 24 ♘xe7+ ♔g7 25 ♘xc8 ♖fxc8 26 e4 and White's advantage persists into the endgame, although Black has reasonable hopes of saving the game.

22 ♘f3 c4

Admitting that Black's previous move was a waste of time, but after 22...♘d4 23 ♘e5 ♘c6 24 f4 ♘xe5 25 fxe5 ♕e6 26 ♖1d6 ♕h3 27 ♖c7, with tremendous pressure, or 22...♖d8 23 ♕b7 ♖xd7 24 ♖xd7, winning a pawn, Black's prospects are also grim.

23 ♕h4!



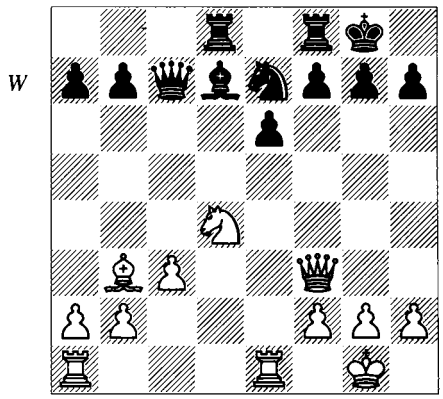
There's no defence to White's threats of 24 ♕h6 followed by 25 ♖1d4! or 24 ♖1d6 followed by 25 ♖xe6!.

23...♘c5

23...♖d8 24 ♘e5 is also crushing.

24 ♖e7 ♖d8 25 ♖f1! 1-0

In view of 25...♕c6 26 ♘g5 h5 27 ♘xf7! ♖xf7 28 ♖xf7 ♔xf7 29 ♕xd8.



Mista – Gdanski
Polish Ch, Warsaw 2010

Currently White has a slight advantage. His pieces are more actively placed, and it isn't easy for Black to improve the activity of his bishop. The simplest move is 17 ♖ad1, with the idea of ♕g3, since in an ending White's queenside majority is more likely to be an asset.

17 ♖e3?!

Instead, White plays for an attack, based on some combination of ♕h5, ♖h3 and ♗c2. However, there are no weaknesses in Black's position and it is easy for him to nullify the threats, after which White's pieces are misplaced.

17...♘g6

Now 18 ♕h5 can be met by 18...♘f4.

18 ♗c2

White tries a different tack, moving the bishop first so that after ♕h5 the knight will be pinned against the mate on h7.

18...e5!

Black takes his chance to play actively.

19 ♘f5 ♗c6 20 ♗e4?

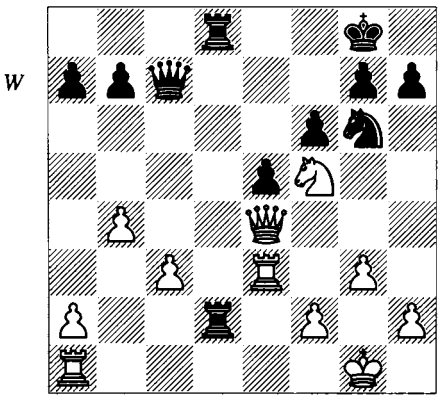
Fatal inconsistency. Once White has decided to play for an attack, he must continue along that path. The reason is that in preparing his attack, White has compromised the position of his pieces, since the rook on e3 is doing nothing if there is no attack. In particular, White has abandoned the d-file, which is one of the most important features of the position.

20 ♕h5! is correct; after 20...♗xg2 (20...♖fe8 21 ♖h3 h6 22 ♘xg7! ♔xg7 23 ♕xh6+ ♔f6 24 ♖h5 will lead to perpetual check) 21 ♖g3 ♖d2 22 ♗b3 ♗d5 23 ♕g5! ♗xb3 24 ♕xd2 ♗e6 25 ♕d6 an unclear position arises in which Black has adequate play for his small material sacrifice, but probably no more than that.

20...♖d2 21 b4 ♖fd8

In the space of two moves, everything has gone wrong for White. He has no attack, and Black is in total control of the open d-file.

22 g3 ♗xe4 23 ♕xe4 f6



There's no way White can challenge Black's command of the d-file, so Black can afford to play slowly. This move reinforces the e5-pawn, thus permitting ...♘e7 to exchange off White's only well-placed piece.

24 c4 ♘e7 25 c5

White's queenside majority is completely irrelevant in this position since it isn't going anywhere while Black is in control of the position.

25...♘xf5 26 ♕xf5 ♕c6 27 a3 ♖8d4 28 ♖c1 g6 29 ♕f3 a6 30 ♔g2 ♔f7

Queens will be exchanged sooner or later so Black improves his king position. When the opponent has no active play, one can afford the luxury of such moves.

31 h4 h5 32 ♖b3 ♖a2

32...e4 33 ♕e3 ♖4d3 34 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 35 ♕f4 ♖xa3 permits White some counterplay after 36 ♕h6. Black's systematic approach allows no counterplay and is more practical.

33 ♔g1 ♖dd2 34 ♖f1 ♕xf3 35 ♖xf3 ♔e6

Control of the open file has been converted into control of the seventh rank.

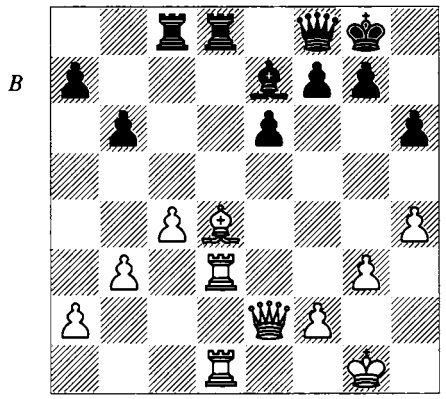
36 ♖c1 e4 37 ♖f4 f5

White's rook is in a tragicomic position.

38 c6 bxc6 39 ♖xc6+ ♖d6 40 ♖xd6+ ♔xd6 41 f3 ♖xa3 42 fxe4 ♖xg3+ 43 ♔f2 ♖g4 0-1

26 The Seventh Rank

When a 'rook on the seventh' is mentioned, one normally thinks in terms of an endgame, but such a rook can also be a major advantage in the middlegame. Just as in an endgame, the rook is able to target enemy pawns along the seventh rank and, if the pawns advance, to switch behind them.



Shirov – Sumets
Warsaw (rapid) 2008

White has a slight advantage since his rooks are already doubled on the d-file, and if there are multiple exchanges his queenside majority might be of value in an endgame. Although at the moment his advantage is no more than an edge, Black must take care in case White uses his greater d-file control to penetrate with a rook into Black's position.

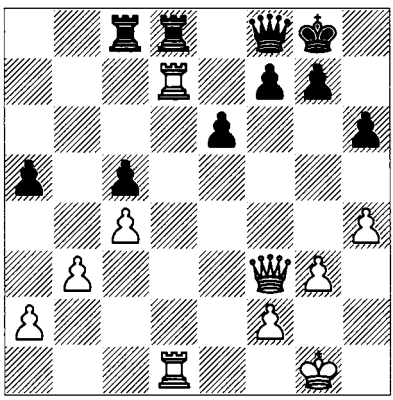
25...♗c5?

In his haste to clarify the situation, Black overlooks an important point and allows White to occupy the seventh rank with his rook. Black should give priority to doubling rooks himself by 25...♖d6!. Then the sacrifice 26 ♗xg7?! ♔xg7 27 ♕g4+ (not 27 ♕e5+? f6 and Black wins) 27...♔h7 28 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 29 ♕e4+ leads to at most a draw. However, even after the sounder reply 26 a4 ♖cd8 27 a5 ♕e8, Black is very close to equality.

26 ♗xc5 bxc5 27 ♖d7!

It's easy to overlook a move such as this, in which a piece moves along a line towards a similar enemy piece but then stops half-way. Here it allows White's rook to take up a dominant position and Black already has to deal with the threat to his a-pawn.

27...a5 28 ♕f3



Black is now also restricted by the lateral attack on f7.

28...♖xd7?!

28...♕e8 is the last defensive chance. Then 29 ♕b7 ♖a8 30 ♔g2 leaves Black under severe pressure but there is no immediate win for White.

29 ♖xd7 a4

29...♖a8 loses to 30 ♖xf7, so there's no way to prevent ♖a7, which will win the a-pawn. Black therefore decides to give up the pawn voluntarily, but this makes little difference.

30 bxa4

Now White has a dangerous outside passed pawn to add to his other positional advantages.

30...♕e8 31 ♕d3

31 ♖b7! is even stronger, since 31...♖a8 can be met by the neat tactical point 32 ♖e7! ♕f8 33 ♖xf7!.

31...e5 32 a5

The passed pawn is too strong and White easily fends off Black's attempts to expose the white king.

32...e4 33 ♕d2 e3 34 fxe3 ♕e5 35 ♔h2 ♖c6 36 ♕d5 ♕b2+

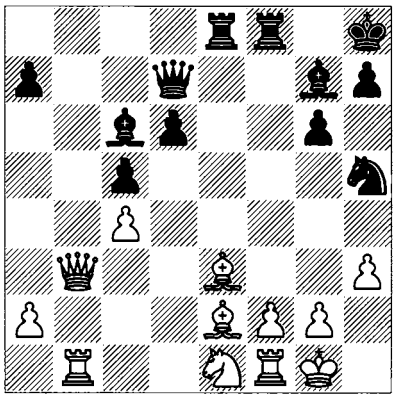
It's only one check since White's king is safe on h3.

37 ♔h3 ♖f6 38 ♖d8+ ♔h7 39 ♕e4+ 1-0

39...g6 40 ♕e8 leads to mate, while after 39...♖g6 40 h5 White wins the rook.

Control of an open file can easily lead to a rook on the seventh rank. When this occurs in the middlegame, it can be even more dangerous than in the endgame, as a rook on the seventh can often form the basis for a direct attack on the king.

B



Svetushkin – Baklan
Romanian Team Ch, Eforie Nord 2009

Black has a definite advantage since his pieces, especially his rooks, are far more actively placed than their white counterparts. Nevertheless, he must find a way to make progress before White can repair the defects of his position. The plan he adopts involves forcing open the e-file, so as to give his e8-rook the chance to penetrate into White's position.

24...♘f4 25 ♗g4

25 ♗xf4 ♖xe2 already allows the rook to reach the seventh rank.

25...♕f7 26 ♗xf4

The knight is a permanent threat to White's kingside, so he decides to exchange it sooner rather than later.

26...♕xf4

Threatening 27...♗e5 28 g3 ♕e4.

27 ♗f3

The most natural move, seeking to neutralize the dangerous c6-bishop.

27...♗d7

27...♗xf3 28 ♘xf3 ♖e2 is ineffective as White can simply play 29 ♖fe1. Keeping the bishop is more dangerous and indeed creates an immediate threat of 28...♗e6 29 ♗d5 ♗xd5 30 cxd5 c4, when the c-pawn is very strong.

28 ♗d5

White meets the threat, but now e2 is undefended, giving Black's e8-rook the chance to enter White's position.

28...♗f5

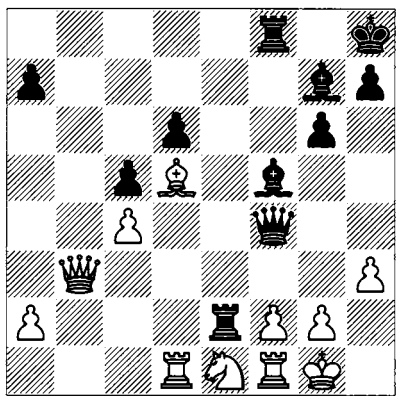
After the immediate 28...♖e2 White can defend by 29 ♘f3.

29 ♖d1?!

29 ♘d3 is the best chance, based on the tactical point that 29...♕g5 30 ♖be1 ♗xh3? loses material after 31 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 32 f4 ♕g3? (or 32...♕g4 33 ♘f2) 33 ♘e5! ♕xb3 34 ♘f7+ ♔g8 35 ♘xd6+. 29...♕h4 is better, but then 30 ♖be1 prevents the rook penetration and limits Black to a modest advantage.

29...♖e2

W



The rook reaches the seventh rank, not only putting pressure on the a-pawn, but also helping to create direct threats against White's king.

30 a4

Simply giving up the a-pawn by 30 ♕f3 ♕xf3 31 ♘xf3 ♖xa2 is cheerless, but after the move played, Black has a free tempo to step up his kingside pressure.

30...♗e5 31 g3 ♕h6 32 ♘d3?

This cuts the white queen off from the kingside and so guarantees the success of Black's assault. However, even the superior 32 ♕f3 is very awkward for White after 32...♖b2.

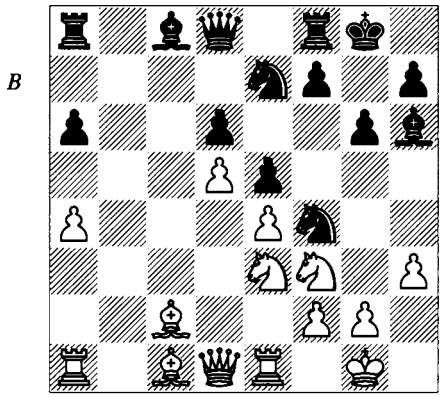
32...♗d4 33 ♘f4

Or 33 h4 g5 34 hxg5 ♕xg5 35 ♘f4 ♗c2 36 ♕f3 ♖xf2! (a typical breakthrough in which the rook on the seventh rank plays a leading role) 37 ♖xf2 ♖xf4 38 ♕xf4 ♕xf4 39 gxf4 ♗xd1 40 a5 ♔g7 with an easily winning ending for Black.

33...♗c2 34 ♕f3 ♗xd1 0-1

27 Outposts

An outpost is a square in the opponent's part of the board from which a piece cannot be driven by an enemy pawn. If an outpost can be permanently occupied, it can confer a large or even decisive advantage.



Leko – Navara
Dresden Olympiad 2008

This position arose from a Closed Ruy Lopez, but it looks like an unfavourable King's Indian. White has already opened lines on the queenside, while Black's kingside counterplay has not yet started. The potential outpost on c6 is important as it could be occupied by ♘c4-a5-c6.

24...f5

Although this is essential if Black is to create active play, it has the side-effect of potentially weakening the e6-square. At the moment White is not in a position to exploit this, but it is something that both players will have to bear in mind.

25 ♘c4?!

25 ♖b1 is more accurate, as it's important to be the first to occupy the open file.

25...fxe4 26 ♗xe4 ♖a7?!

Now Black's difficulties increase. He should try 26...♗f5 or 26...♖b8.

27 ♖b1 ♖c7

27...♘f5 is met by 28 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 29 ♕d3 (threatening 30 ♖b6 – an example of a rook outpost) 29...♖c7 30 ♘a5 and the knight reaches the outpost on c6.

28 ♕b3

Simple and strong, defending the knight in preparation for ♗a3.

28...♗f5?

Black should try 28...♘f5, although White retains a considerable advantage after 29 ♗xf4 ♗xf4 30 ♘a5, heading for c6.

29 ♗xf4

Leko chooses a simple plan which involves exploiting the e6-square. The complicated tactical shot 29 ♘fxe5! is probably even stronger, but sometimes it's better to play simply and safely.

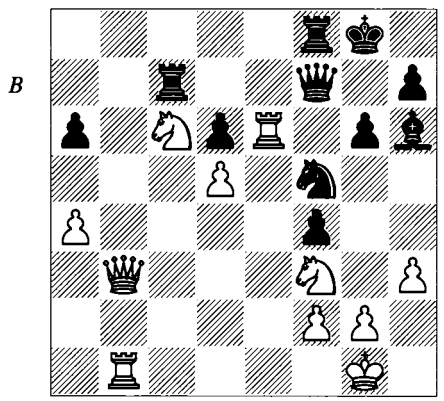
29...exf4

29...♗xf4 is impossible as 30 ♘cxe5! is now completely clear-cut.

30 ♗xf5 ♘xf5 31 ♘a5

Now White can occupy both c6 and e6.

31...♕d7 32 ♘c6 ♕f7 33 ♖e6



Thanks to the lateral pressure against d6, it's not easy for Black to expel the rook by ...♘g7.

33...♖fc8 34 ♖be1

White's pieces on c6 and e6 control so many squares that Black can hardly move.

34...♗f8

34...♖b7 35 ♕d3 ♖a8 36 ♘d2 followed by a5 and ♘c4-b6 would add yet another outpost!

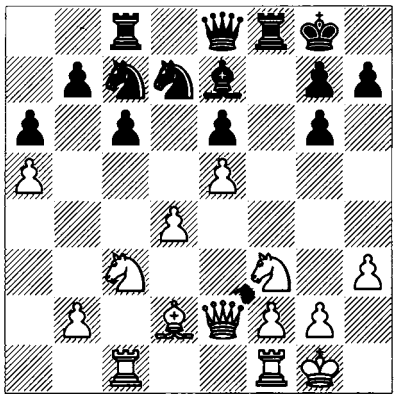
35 ♘g5 ♕d7 36 ♕f3 ♘g7 37 ♖f6

A typical advantage of a rook outpost is the ability of the rook to exert pressure or move horizontally from the outpost.

37...♖e8 38 ♖xe8 ♕xe8 39 ♖xf4 ♖b7 40 ♖e4 ♕c8 41 g4 1-0

Black decided not to suffer any more punishment. After ♖f4, followed by ♘e4-f6+, it would soon be over in any case.

W



Kasimdzhanov – Megaranto
Dresden Olympiad 2008

Sometimes preparation is necessary before a potential outpost can be exploited. Here White has a clear positional advantage thanks to his space advantage, but he must still make progress. There's a potential outpost on d6, but for the moment it is controlled by Black's bishop.

18 ♘e4

Threatening to exchange the bishop by ♗g5, a threat which Black counters.

18...h6 19 ♗e3 g5 20 ♘fd2

The knight is on its way to c4 to step up the pressure on d6.

20...♕g6 21 f3 ♖cd8 22 ♘c4 ♘b5

Once again Black musters enough firepower to prevent a knight from jumping into d6. White decides to prepare b4 followed by ♘c5 (c5 is also an outpost as the knight cannot be expelled from c5 by a pawn). The pressure on e6 and b7 will force Black to exchange on c5. By retaking with the b-pawn, White will increase his control of d6.

23 ♖cd1

White improves the position of his rooks first, since Black has no counterplay and cannot improve his position.

23...♔h8 24 ♖d3 ♔g8 25 ♖fd1 ♔h8 26 ♕e1

Now White is ready to play b4.

26...♔g8 27 b4 ♔h8 28 ♖b3

White cannot play 28 ♘c5?? at once due to 28...♘xc5 29 bxc5 ♗xc5, so the vulnerable rook must first move to a safer square.

28...♔g8 29 ♕e2

Now the problem is 29 ♘c5?? ♘xc5 30 bxc5 ♕c2 winning material, so White covers c2 with his queen (note that his previous move defended b4 in preparation for this manoeuvre).

29...♔h8 30 ♗f2 ♔g8 31 ♔h1

White continues to take his time; these moves are directed against counterplay by ...h5 and ...g4.

31...♔h8 32 ♘c5

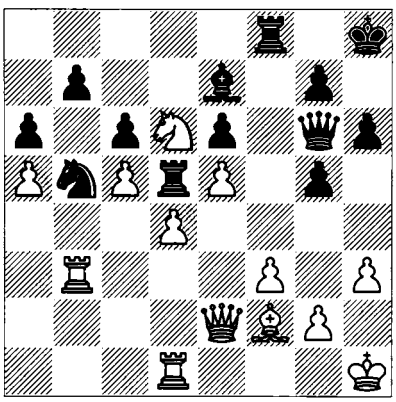
At last White is ready to jump in. There's no way to defend b7, so Black has to take.

32...♘xc5 33 bxc5

White has turned the potential outpost at d6 into a real one and is ready to occupy it.

33...♖d5 34 ♘d6

B



34...♗d8?

Up to here Black has defended well by recognizing that he had nothing better than waiting, but he now panics and allows White to take the vital b7-pawn, which leaves his remaining queenside pawns weak. He should continue defending passively by 34...♖b8, leaving White with the burden of finding a way to improve his position. One idea would be to transfer a rook to e4 and ultimately undertake some action on the kingside, but it would still require a lot of work.

35 ♘xb7 ♗c7 36 ♘d6 ♗xa5

Otherwise Black is a pawn down, but removing the a5-pawn gives White a route to penetrate into Black's position.

37 ♕e4 ♕h5

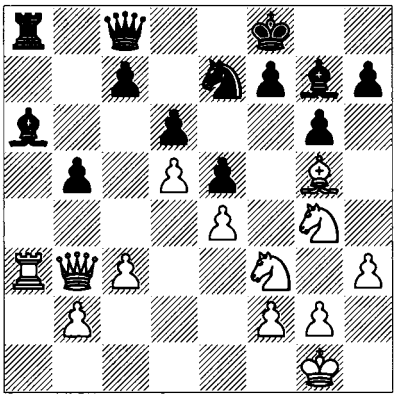
37...♕xe4 38 fxe4 ♖xd6 39 exd6 ♖xf2 40 ♖a1 ♗d8 41 ♖xa6 is also hopeless for Black.

38 ♖a1 ♗c3 39 ♘xb5! ♗xa1 40 ♘c7 g4

Or 40...♖d7 41 ♕xc6 followed by ♘xe6, with three connected passed pawns in the centre.

41 ♘xe6 ♖e8 42 ♘xg7! ♔xg7 43 ♖b7+ ♔f8 44 ♕h7 1-0

28 The Dominant Knight



Azarov – B. Socko
Ostrava 2009

A knight firmly entrenched on the sixth rank is usually a dominant force and is quite capable of deciding the game by itself. Indeed, it can be worth sacrificing material just to establish such a knight. In the diagram there's not much sign of a knight on the sixth, but White found a creative piece sacrifice aimed at occupying e6.

24 ♕b4

Threatening 25 ♗xe7+ ♔xe7 26 ♘gxe5, so Black moves the vulnerable knight away.

24...♘g8

24...♕d8 25 ♖a5! is also very unpleasant, since White renews the threat of ♗xe7+ (as now ...♕xe7 loses a piece to ♕a3).

25 ♘gxe5!

This is the piece sacrifice. Black is forced to play for material gain, since otherwise he has just lost a pawn for nothing.

25...♗xe5

25...f6 26 ♘c6 fxg5 27 ♘xg5 is even worse, because here White has established two knights on the sixth!

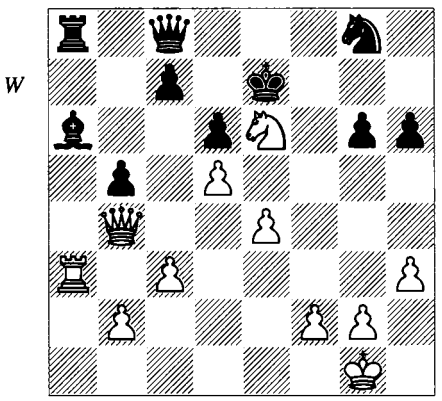
26 ♘xe5 f6 27 ♘f3 fxg5 28 ♘xg5

White has two pawns for the piece but, more importantly, he has a wonderful outpost on e6 for his knight.

28...h6?

Black is too concerned about the h-pawn and drives the knight where it wants to go in any case. The best defence is 28...c5, which either gains time or eliminates the d5-pawn which provides support for the e6-outpost. Then 29 dxc6 ♕xc6 30 ♕b3 ♘h6 (30...♖a7 31 ♘e6+ ♔e8 32 ♘d4 ♕c4 33 ♕xc4 bxc4 34 ♘b5 ♗xb5 35 ♖xa7 gives White a large endgame advantage) 31 ♕e6 ♖e8 32 ♖xa6 ♕xa6 33 ♕d7 d5 34 ♕xh7 dxe4 35 ♕xh6+ ♔e7 36 ♘xe4 is much better for White, but he must still work to win.

29 ♘e6+ ♔e7



Although White has no immediate threats, Black's position is hopeless. The e6-knight exerts a suffocating influence over Black's whole position and there is no black piece which has a realistic chance of eliminating the knight. It only takes a few moves for White to bring his queen and rook into position for a decisive attack.

30 c4

Allowing the rook access to f3 and preparing to swing the queen into the attack via c3.

30...c5 31 ♕c3 ♘f6 32 ♕g3

32 e5! wins at once, but the move played is good enough.

32...♗b7

32...♕g8 33 e5 is devastating.

33 ♖f3

With threats such as 34 ♖xf6 ♔xf6 35 ♕c3+, 34 ♕xg6 and 34 e5, Black has no hope of survival.

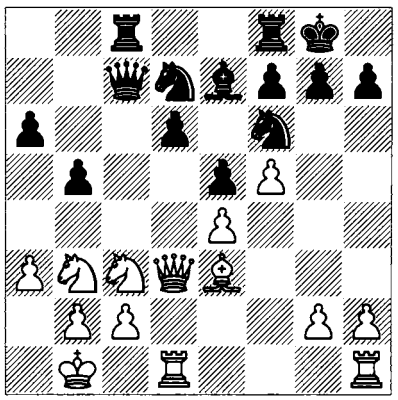
33...♕h8 34 ♘f4

The knight quits its post to land a devastating blow at g6.

34...♔d7 35 ♘xg6 ♕d8 36 ♕h4 ♘e8 37 ♖f7+ ♔c8 38 ♘e7+ 1-0

Next move ♘c6+ will win Black's queen.

A stable knight outpost on the fifth rank may not be as devastating as one on the sixth, but it's still a major asset. The archetypal case of a knight on the fifth arises when White can play ♘d5 in the Sicilian; indeed, many lines of the Sicilian revolve around control of this square. If Black can arrange an immediate exchange of the knight, then playing ♘d5 may not give White much, but if the knight can stay on d5 for several moves, it may exert a powerful influence on the game (one of the few exceptions to this arises in the Sveshnikov variation, in which Black has the two bishops and a strong centre to compensate for the d5-knight).



Svidler – E. Berg
European Clubs Cup, Plovdiv 2010

Black's f6-knight stands ready to hack off any knight arriving on d5, and there's another knight to back it up if White should play ♗g5 and ♗xf6.

18 g4!

White finds the key to securing an advantage. Black is forced to accept the pawn (otherwise White plays g5 followed by ♘d5), but then White's knight can safely occupy d5. The pawn sacrifice doesn't give rise to any rapid threats; instead, White's compensation is based on the longer-term advantages of the d5-knight and the threats along the g-file, which offer him good play for the pawn.

18...♘xg4 19 ♘d5 ♕d8 20 ♖hg1 ♘xe3

20...♘gf6? 21 ♗h6 and 20...♘df6? 21 ♗b6 ♕d7 22 ♕e2 both cost Black material, so he has little choice, but now Black has one knight less to challenge the monster on d5.

21 ♕xe3 ♔h8

21...♘f6 22 ♕h6 g6 23 ♖g3 is winning for White, so Black has to tuck his king away.

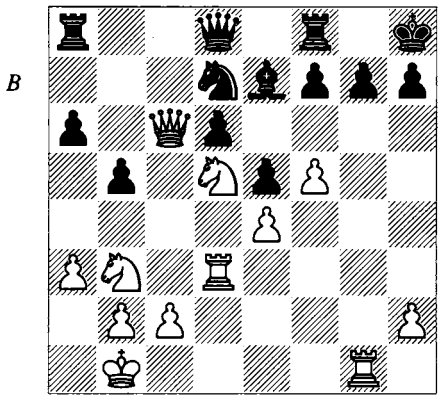
22 ♕a7

22 ♘a5!? is also promising, since 22...♘f6? loses to 23 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 24 ♘b7 ♕d7 25 ♕g5+ ♔h8 26 ♘xf6. The move played, which pins the d7-knight and so prevents ...♘f6, also gives White some advantage.

22...♖a8 23 ♕b7 ♗f6

Unpinning the knight, but leaving the d6-pawn vulnerable.

24 ♕c6 ♗e7 25 ♖d3



25...♘f6?

25...♖g8 is a more resilient defence, but even here 26 ♕b7 ♗f8 27 ♖c3 leaves White with plenty of pressure for the pawn.

26 ♘xf6 gxf6

26...♗xf6 27 ♖xd6 ♕e7 28 ♖d7 ♖ac8 29 ♕b7 ♕e8 30 ♖gd1 is also very bad for Black.

27 ♖dg3

Black has swapped off the d5-knight, but at the cost of damaging his pawn-structure and exposing his king.

27...♕c8?

27...♖c8 28 ♕xa6 ♕c7 was the last chance.

28 ♕d5 ♕c4 29 ♕b7 ♖ae8 30 ♘a5 ♕c8 31 ♕d5 ♕c5 32 ♕b3

Missing an instant win by 32 ♕d2! ♖c8 (or 32...♖g8 33 ♕g2) 33 ♕h6 ♕xc2+ 34 ♔a2 ♖g8 35 ♕xh7+ but the move played also leads to victory, albeit more slowly.

32...♖g8 33 ♕xf7 ♕xg1+ 34 ♖xg1 ♖xg1+ 35 ♔a2 ♖gg8 36 ♘c6 ♗d8 37 ♕d7 ♗b6 38 ♘e7 ♖d8 39 ♕c6 ♗g1 40 ♘xg8 ♔xg8 41 h3 1-0

29 Misplaced Piece

One badly-placed piece can sink an entire position. The usual method of exploiting such a piece is to start some action on another part of the board.

Malakhatko – Ovechkin
Voronezh 2008

1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♗b4 3 e3 ♗xc3 4 bxc3 d6 5 d4 c5 6 ♗d3 ♘c6 7 ♘e2 f5 8 e4 ♘ge7?!

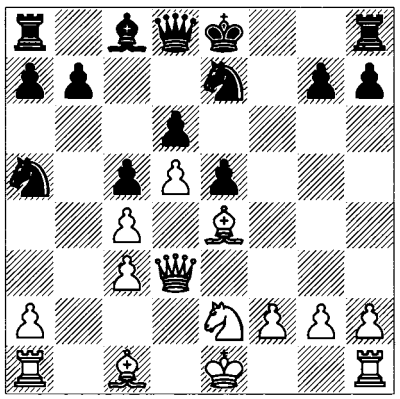
Rather inconsistent. Having played to keep the position closed, 8...f4 is more logical. Then 9 g3? is bad due to 9...f3 10 ♘g1 cxd4 11 ♘xf3 ♗g4, when White is in trouble.

9 d5 fxe4?

And this is definitely wrong, as now White's light-squared bishop becomes very dangerous. 9...♘b8? is also bad, due to 10 f4 opening the position when White is well ahead in development. The best chance is 9...♘a5 10 exf5 ♗xf5 11 ♘g3 ♗xd3 12 ♕xd3 0-0, when White has some advantage due to the poorly-placed knight on a5, but Black is still in the game.

10 ♗xe4 ♘a5 11 ♕d3

B



Black is in serious trouble here, and his problems all come down to the knight on a5. It currently has no moves at all, and bringing it back into the game via b7 and d8 takes several moves, and even then the knight isn't exactly in the thick of the battle.

11...h6

The only way to justify the position of the knight on a5 would be to target the c4-pawn, but Black's position is not strong enough to sustain such a plan; for example, 11...♕d7 12 0-0 ♕a4 13 ♘g3 ♘xc4 (13...♕xc4 14 ♕f3 with ♘h5 or ♗g5 to come is also horrible for Black) 14 ♗g5 h6 15 ♗g6+ ♔d7 16 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 17 ♗h5 and Black faces not only threats to his king based on ♕g6, but also the possibility of losing material after ♗d1 (meeting ...♕a6 with ♗e2).

12 f4

Provided White acts quickly, he will be effectively a piece up on the kingside.

12...0-0 13 0-0 ♗f5 14 ♘g3 ♗xe4 15 ♘xe4 b6

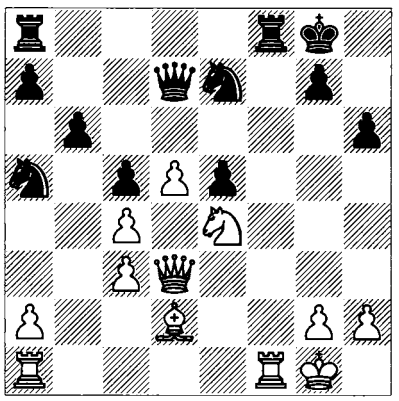
Trying to get the knight back into the game, but it's far too late.

16 ♗d2

Threatening 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8 19 ♖f1.

16...♕d7 17 fxe5 dxe5

W



18 ♗xh6!

A blow exposing Black's king to a lethal attack.

18...♖xf1+

18...gxh6 19 ♘f6+ ♖xf6 20 ♖xf6 and White wins after 20...♖f8 21 ♕g3+ or 20...♘f5 21 ♖f1.

19 ♖xf1 ♖f8 20 ♘f6+!

Black is not allowed to escape with the loss of just a pawn.

20...♖xf6

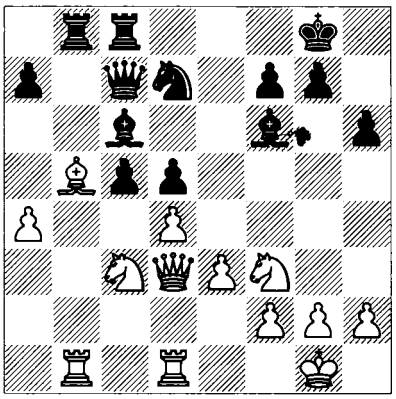
20...gxf6 loses at once to 21 ♕g3+.

21 ♖xf6 gxf6 22 ♕g3+ ♘g6

Or 22...♔f7 23 ♕g7+ ♔e8 24 ♕f8#.

23 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 24 d6 ♘b7 25 ♗f8 1-0

A knight is the most common misplaced piece, but sometimes a bishop is the culprit.



Grishchuk – Gelfand
Nalchik 2009

This position is very close to equality. White has the possibility of a slight advantage since the exchange of the c5- and d4-pawns would leave Black with an isolated d-pawn, but all Black's pieces are in play and he has the two bishops (at least for the moment), so this should not be a serious problem.

18...cxd4 19 exd4 ♗a8?!

Black avoids the exchange of bishops, but only by burying his bishop on an entirely inappropriate square. The simplest solution is to play 19...♗xb5 20 ♘xb5 ♕a5! 21 ♕f5 ♕xa4 22 ♕xd7 a6 with equality after 23 ♘e5 ♗xe5 24 dxe5 ♖d8 25 ♕c6 ♖xb5 26 e6! fxe6 27 ♕xe6+ ♔h8 28 ♖a1. If Black wanted to keep his bishop, then 19...♗b7 was better since after 20 ♕f5 g6! 21 ♕xd7 ♕xd7 22 ♗xd7 ♖xc3 White cannot prevent Black from unpinning himself by ...♖c7.

20 ♕f5 ♕xc3

20...♖d8 21 ♖bc1 ♕d6 22 ♗d3 g6 23 ♕h3 also gives White an edge.

21 ♕xd7 ♕c7 22 ♕f5 ♖b6 23 ♘e5

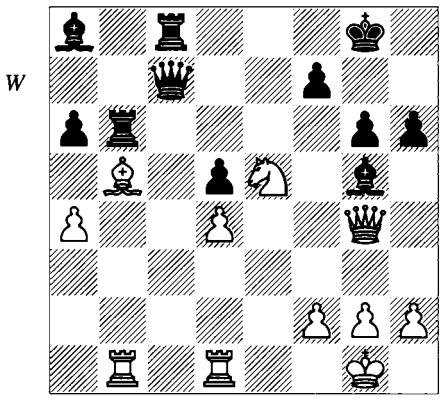
White has definitely taken over the initiative and Black is suffering from his out-of-play bishop.

23...g6 24 ♕f4 ♗g5?!

Chasing the queen, but Black will lose time after a later h4 by White. 24...♗b7 is better, trying to reactivate the bishop.

25 ♕g4 a6?

This could have led to Black's rapid defeat. 25...♗f6 is unpalatable, but the best chance.



26 h4?

26 ♗d3! gives White a winning position, since Black cannot meet the many threats; for example, 26...♖cb8 27 h4 ♗f6 28 ♖bc1 followed by ♘d7, or 26...♖xb1 27 ♖xb1 picking up the pawn on a6.

26...♗f6

26...axb5? 27 hxg5 is winning for White after 27...h5 28 ♕f4! or 27...hxg5 28 ♖xb5 due to his passed pawn and threats against the enemy king.

27 ♗d3 ♖xb1 28 ♖xb1 h5 29 ♕f4 ♗xe5 30 dxe5

Black has survived the immediate crisis but his badly-placed bishop remains a serious handicap.

30...♖e8?!

30...a5 31 ♕g5 ♖e8 is better, but Black remains under pressure after 32 ♖c1 ♕b6 33 ♗b5.

31 ♖c1 ♕d7

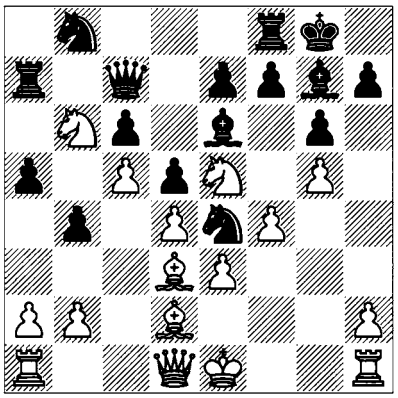
After 31...♕b7 32 e6! ♖xe6 33 ♖c7 ♖f6 34 ♖xb7 ♖xf4 35 ♖b8+ White wins a piece, while 31...♕b6 32 a5! ♕e6 (32...♕xa5 loses to 33 e6!) 33 ♖c7 ♖e7 34 ♖xe7 ♕xe7 35 ♗xa6 offers Black no survival chances.

32 ♗xa6 d4 33 ♗c4 ♕f5 34 ♕xf5 gxf5 35 ♖d1 ♖xe5 36 ♖xd4

White is a clear passed pawn up and has the better kingside pawn-structure. Black fights on for some time but the position is hopeless.

36...♗c6 37 ♗b3 ♖e1+ 38 ♔h2 ♖b1 39 ♗d5 ♗xd5 40 ♖xd5 ♖b4 41 g3 f4 42 a5 fxg3+ 43 fxg3 ♖a4 44 ♖xh5 ♔g7 45 ♖f5 ♔g6 46 g4 f6 47 h5+ ♔g7 48 g5 fxg5 49 ♖xg5+ ♔f6 50 ♖b5 1-0

30 Good and Bad Bishops



Elianov – Malakhov
World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2009

White's plan in the opening was based on gaining space and he has pushed pawns on both sides of the board to achieve this. The danger with this plan is that the chain of pawns from c5 to g5 limits the scope of his dark-squared bishop. A bishop which is restricted by its own pawns is called a **bad bishop**. White's d3-bishop is not restricted by its own pawns and is an example of a **good bishop**. Note that although Black has two pawns fixed on light squares, the e6-bishop is not especially bad since it can easily become active on f5. At the moment the advantages and disadvantages of White's plan are in balance, but he must take care that the bad bishop doesn't become the dominant factor in the position.

15 ♕e2 f6 16 ♘f3?

This passive move is already a serious mistake. 16 ♗xe4 fxe5 (16...dxe4 17 gxf6 exf6 18 ♘ec4 is slightly better for White; he has a bad bishop, but the weak squares b6 and d6 are more significant) 17 ♗c2 exd4 18 exd4 ♗f5 19 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 20 ♕e6+ is at least equal for White.

16...♘d7

Exchanging White's only active minor piece.

17 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 18 gxf6

A sad necessity because 18 0-0-0? loses to 18...fxg5 19 fxg5 ♗g4.

18...exf6 19 0-0-0 ♗f5

White has no compensation for his inactive dark-squared bishop. A bad bishop is often coupled with weaknesses on squares of the other colour; here, for example, e4 is firmly in Black's control.

20 ♖dg1?

20 ♗e1 is better, although Black has a clear advantage in any case. The move played is a mistake because it allows Black to exchange White's light-squared bishop for a knight. While a bad bishop is a handicap, its negative effects are often masked if the other bishop is still on the board. Once the good bishop disappears, there may be no way to fight for control of the resulting weak squares.

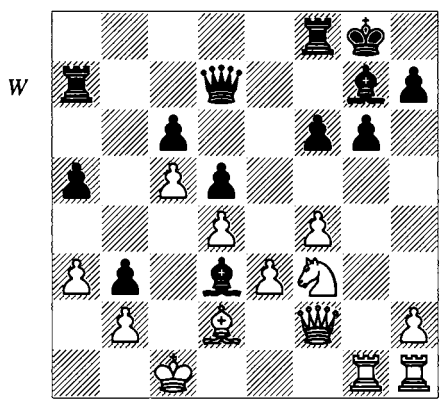
20...b3! 21 a3

21 axb3 a4 gives Black a crushing attack.

21...♘f2!

Since 22 ♗xf5 ♕xf5 costs White material thanks to the mate threat on c2, he cannot avoid the exchange of his light-squared bishop.

22 ♕xf2 ♗xd3



A nightmare bad-bishop situation. The d2-bishop has almost zero activity, while Black runs riot over the weakened light squares.

23 h4 h5 24 ♖g3 ♗f5 25 ♗c3 a4 26 ♘d2 ♔h7 27 ♖hg1 ♗h6 28 ♘b1

White can only wait. ♚

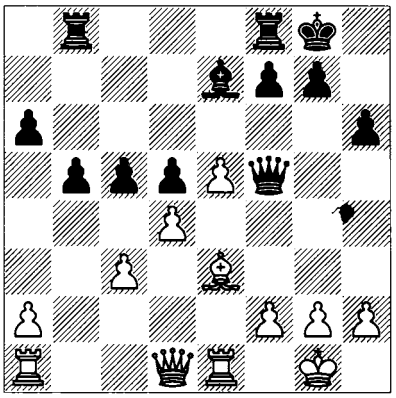
28...♖e8 29 ♗d2 ♗g4 30 ♘c3 ♕f5 31 ♗e1

Now that everything is ready, Black breaks through on the same-coloured squares as the bad bishop.

31...♗xf4! 0-1

Black wins after 32 exf4 ♖e2! 33 ♘xe2 ♕c2#.

B



Nijboer – Yakovenko
Spanish Team Ch, Sabadell 2008

The opening hasn't gone well for White and he has been left with a bad bishop, while all the other minor pieces have disappeared. His main hope of counterplay is to start an attack based on the advance of his kingside pawn-majority. Black has to be alert to nullify this plan.

21...c4

A brave move. Black declares that he is not scared by White's kingside pawns and cements his advantage on the queenside, where he will eventually be able to create a passed pawn.

22 g4 ♕d7 23 f4 f5!

A typical method of taking the sting out of advancing pawns, and a good counterexample to the doubtful principle that you should not touch your pawns on the side where you are being attacked. If White plays gxf5 or leaves the pawn on f5 then White's pawns are blocked and another pawn, the one on f4, will be fixed on a dark square. The only hope of activating the bishop lies in playing exf6 followed by f5, but opening the e-file gives Black another avenue of attack and offers him access to the weak square at e4.

24 exf6

White decides this is the lesser evil.

24...♗xf6 25 a3

Trying to hold back the pawns, at least for the moment. 25 f5 b4 gives Black a protected passed pawn and leaves the d4-pawn isolated.

25...♗h4!

One of the little finesses that make the difference between a small advantage and a large one. Because the g4-pawn is attacked, the rook has to move to f1, but then Black is able to seize control of the e-file.

26 ♖f1 ♖be8 27 ♕f3 ♖e4

We see again how having a bad bishop has implications beyond the bishop's lack of mobility. Because the bishop and pawns control squares of the same colour, the squares of the opposite colour are weak and provide outposts for the enemy pieces.

28 f5 ♖fe8 29 ♗f4

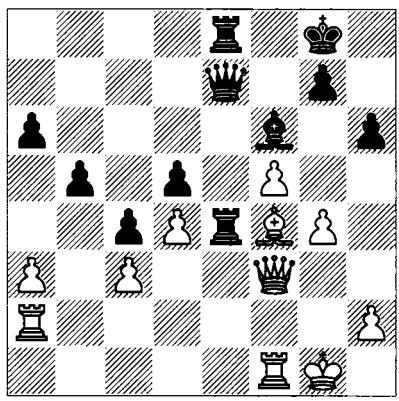
Hoping to activate the bishop at e5, but Black's next move prevents this.

29...♗f6 30 ♖a2

30 ♕g3 intends h4 and g5, but this plan is thwarted by 30...♕e7.

30...♕e7

W



Black totally dominates the position and need only organize ...a5 and ...b4 to break down White's defence.

31 ♔g2 ♔h7 32 h3 a5 33 ♖b2

Attempting to prevent ...b4, but the cure is no better than the disease.

33...♕xa3 34 ♖xb5 ♖e2+ 35 ♔h1?

This loses at once. The best chance is 35 ♔g1 but Black should still win after 35...♖e1 36 ♖xd5 ♕a1! 37 ♗e5 (37 ♗d2 ♖xf1+ 38 ♕xf1 ♕b2 39 ♕d1 ♕b8! 40 ♕f3 ♕b1+ 41 ♕f1 ♕c2 gives Black a winning attack) 37...♖xf1+ 38 ♕xf1 ♕xc3 since his a-pawn will be too strong.

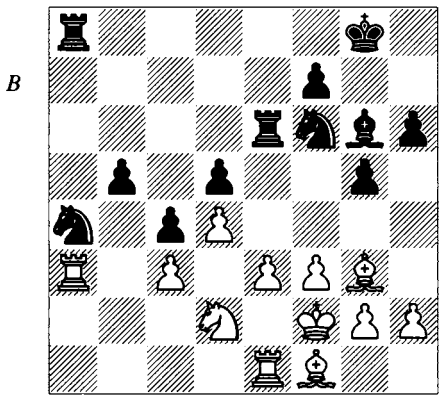
35...♖c2 36 g5 ♖xc3 37 ♕g4

Now 37 g6+ ♔h8 38 ♕xd5 loses to 38...♖c2 and Black is threatening mate by 39...♕xh3+.

37...♗xg5 38 f6 ♗xf6 39 ♖xd5 ♖xh3+ 40 ♔g2 ♖h4 41 ♕f5+ ♔h8 42 ♗e5 ♗xe5 43 ♖xe5 ♖b8 44 ♖fe1 ♖f8 0-1

31 When a Bad Bishop is Good

It's important to be flexible when assessing the power of bishops. It's not enough simply to count the number of pawns fixed on the same colour squares as the bishop, since the concrete possibilities available to the bishop are often more important than arithmetic. There are some general situations in which theoretically bad bishops can prove surprisingly effective. The first of these arises when the player with the bad bishop has a large space advantage. Thanks to the extra space, his bad bishop may have plenty of room to manoeuvre and the limiting effect of the pawns is much reduced.



Radjabov – Elianov
Astrakhan 2010

Black's bishop is bad in the sense that his c- and d-pawns are fixed on light squares, but it is placed on a useful diagonal. White's theoretically good bishop on f1 is currently the worst minor piece on the board since it has few active possibilities.

25...♘d7 26 h4?!

White should take the chance to play 26 e4, fighting for space.

26...f5!

This restricts the g6-bishop, but it's more important to prevent the liberating e4.

27 hxg5 hxg5 28 f4 g4

Yet another pawn on a light square, but now White's good bishop on f1 is totally sealed in. It's clear that Black is the only one with active possibilities, since he might eventually break through by ...b4 or penetrate down the a-file.

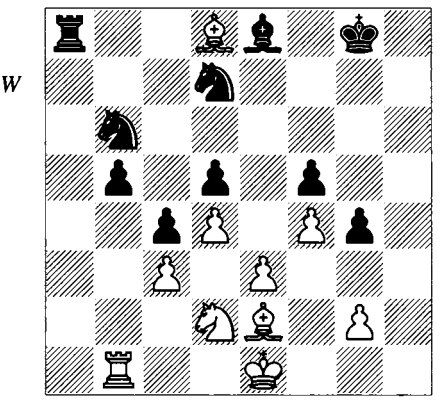
29 ♖b1 ♖a5 30 ♗e2 ♖ea6 31 ♗h4

White's bad bishop can move outside the pawn-chain and is a better piece than his good bishop.

31...♘ab6 32 ♖xa5 ♖xa5 33 ♗d8 ♗e8!

This indirectly defends b5, so that Black can chase White's bishop away by ...♖a8. Black's bad bishop provides a vital supporting role for his queenside play.

34 ♔e1 ♖a8



35 ♗e7?!

White intends to play his bishop to b4 to prevent a queenside breakthrough, but this allows Black's rook to occupy a dominant position on the seventh rank. However, even after 35 ♗c7 ♖a7! 36 ♗d8 (36 ♗d6 ♘c8 37 ♗b4 ♖a2 is again awkward for White) 36...♘a4 37 ♖a1 ♘b8 Black retains considerable pressure, although White might be able to hold the game.

35...♔f7 36 ♗b4 ♖a2 37 ♗d1 ♔e6 38 ♖c1 ♘b8! 39 ♖c2 ♖a1 40 ♖b2 ♘a6 41 ♖b1 ♖a2 42 g3

Weakening the g-pawn, but 42 ♗e2 ♘xb4 43 ♖xb4 ♘a4 44 ♘b1 g3! 45 ♔d1 ♘b2+ 46 ♔e1 ♘d3+ 47 ♗xd3 cxd3 48 ♘d2 ♖c2 is hopeless for White.

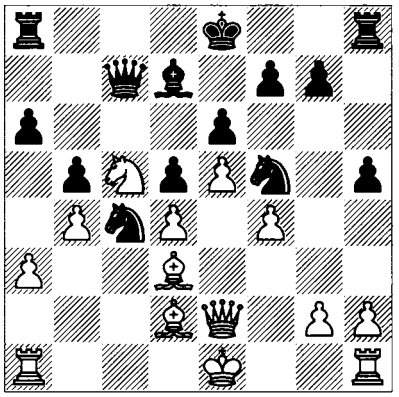
42...♘d7 43 ♗e2 ♘xb4 44 ♖xb4 ♘f6 45 ♔d1 ♖a1+ 46 ♖b1 ♖xb1+ 47 ♘xb1 ♘e4 48 ♗f1 ♘xg3 49 ♗g2 ♘e4 50 ♔e2 ♔d6 51 ♗xe4

White finally gets rid of his dreadful 'good' bishop, but it's too late.

51...dxe4 52 ♘a3 ♔c6 53 ♘c2 ♔b6 54 ♔f2 ♔a5 55 ♔g3 ♔a4 56 d5 ♗d7 0-1

When the opponent has a weak colour complex, a bishop operating on the same-coloured squares may be theoretically bad, but is often the best piece to exploit the weaknesses. This applies especially when the opponent lacks a bishop with which to defend the weakened squares.

W



Kuzubov – Ulybin
Trieste 2010

23 ♗c3

White's dark-squared bishop may appear to have few active prospects; indeed, at the moment its only real duty is to defend the d4-pawn. However, Black's weakened dark squares potentially offer this bishop a glorious future. Note that Black's bishop really is bad, in both senses of the word, since it is blocked in by its own pawns and there is no real way for Black to change the situation. His only real hope is that the blocked nature of the position will prevent White making progress.

23...♖a7 24 0-0 g6 25 ♖f3

By playing his rook to h3, White introduces the possibility of g4.

25...♗c6 26 ♖h3 ♖h6

White's basic plan is to take on f5 and play his dark-squared bishop to e1, h4 and f6, but he need not rush as Black has no counterplay.

27 ♕f2 ♕e7 28 ♗e1 ♔f8 29 ♗c2

Clearing the d-file for the rook to defend the d-pawn from d1, which will release the queen to clear the path from e1 to h4.

29...♔g8 30 ♖d1 ♖a8

Black is unable to play actively since 30...a5 would only rebound after 31 ♗xf5 exf5 32 bxa5 ♘xa5 33 ♗xa5 ♖xa5 34 ♖e1 followed by e6, with a winning position for White.

31 ♕e2 ♖h7 32 ♗xf5 exf5 33 ♗h4 ♕e8 34 ♖e1

A useful move nipping any counterplay by ...a5 in the bud, since 34...a5 35 bxa5 ♖xa5 36 e6 fxe6 37 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 38 ♖xe6 is crushing.

34...♗d7 35 ♗f6 ♗e6

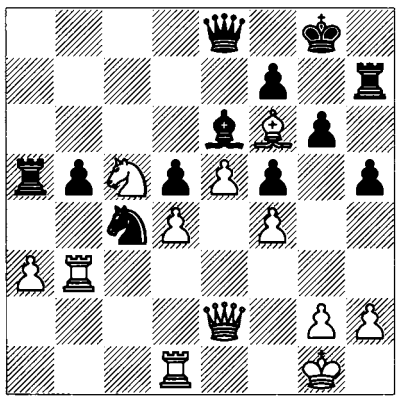
Blocking the e-pawn and so enabling possible counterplay by ...a5.

36 ♖d1 a5

If Black continues to defend passively by 36...♖a7, White wins with 37 ♖dd3 ♖a8 38 ♖dg3 ♔f8 39 ♖g5 followed by a sacrifice on h5.

37 bxa5 ♖xa5 38 ♖b3

B



Black's difficulties are not confined to one side of the board. Thanks to White's bishop on f6, Black's rook on h7 is permanently cut off from the queenside. Thus if White can open lines on that side he will be effectively a rook up. The contrast between the two bishops, both of which are theoretically bad, is remarkable.

38...♗d7?! 39 ♕d3?!

Missing an instant win by 39 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 40 ♖db1 followed by a4, and the rooks penetrate.

39...♖h6 40 h3 ♖h7 41 ♖db1?!

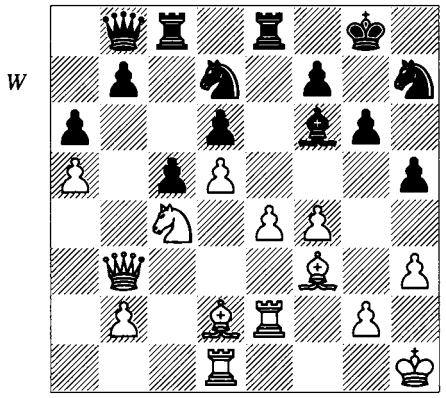
White could also have won by ♘xd7 on either of the last two moves, but now Black moves his bishop away and the chance disappears.

41...♗c8 42 ♕c3

The plan is ♕b4 followed by ♖c3 and then a4, again opening a file.

42...♕c6 43 ♕b4 ♕a8 44 ♖c3 ♘d2 45 ♘b3 ♘xb3 46 ♖bxb3 ♗d7 47 ♖c7 ♗e6 48 ♕e7 1-0

32 Opening Lines



Brynell – Wedberg
Swedish Team Ch 2006/7

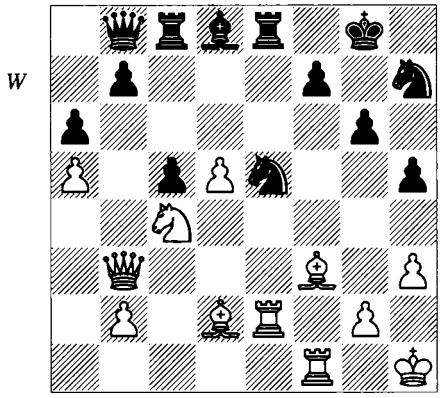
White clearly has a large advantage since he controls far more space and his pieces are much more actively placed than Black's. In addition, he has the two bishops and an annoying attack on d6. Nevertheless, he still has to win the game. In common with many positions in which one side has a considerable advantage, the key to pressing the advantage home is to open lines. By opening the position and removing the obstructive pawns, White will give his pieces the chance to target weak points in the enemy position. Opening lines is usually done in one of two ways: by a pawn advance, or by a sacrifice.

Here the obvious way to open lines is by the central pawn push e5, but White need not be in any rush to play this move. First he needs to identify the main weak point in Black's position once the position has opened up. This is the f7-square, which is only defended by Black's king. If White can play e5 and d6, the queen will be well placed to attack f7, while the bishop can help by moving to d5. To reinforce the attack, he should have at least one rook on the f-file. White's position is so strong that there is more than one path to success; the one he chooses should be amply sufficient to win.

34 ♖de1 ♗h4 35 ♖f1 ♗d8 36 e5!

The time is ripe for the breakthrough. Black cannot allow White's knight to land on d6, so he is forced to take the pawn on e5.

36...dxe5 37 fxe5 ♘xe5



38 ♖fe1?

White is distracted from targeting the main weak spot on f7 by the tempting pin along the e-file, and so gives Black a fleeting tactical opportunity. The simplest way to win is to play consistently against f7 by 38 d6!; after 38...♗f6 39 ♘xe5 ♖xe5 40 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 41 ♗d5 ♕xd6 (41...♖f8 42 ♗h6 is also hopeless for Black) 42 ♖xf7 ♔h8 43 ♕xb7 Black's position collapses. Opening more lines with the sacrifice 38 ♗xh5! is also decisive: 38...gxh5 (otherwise White plays d6 or ♗xg6) 39 ♕g3+ ♔h8 40 ♘xe5 with a winning attack.

38...♗c7?

Now White is again winning. 38...♗g5!, unpinning the knight, restricts White to a modest advantage: 39 ♗xg5 (39 ♖xe5 ♗xd2 40 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 41 ♖xe8+?! ♕xe8 42 ♘xd2 ♕e1+ is at least equal for Black) 39...♘xf3 40 ♕xf3 ♘xg5 41 ♕f6 ♘h7 42 ♕f2 ♖xe2 43 ♕xe2 ♕f4 and, although White has good compensation for the pawn, Black has fair drawing chances.

39 d6!

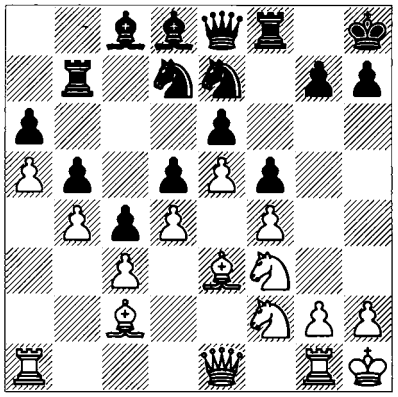
This line-opening move is crushing, since it pins the f-pawn and so prevents Black from defending the knight with ...f6.

39...♗xd6 40 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 41 ♗c3 c4

Blocking the a2-g8 diagonal to allow ...f6, but driving the queen to another dangerous square.

42 ♕xb7 f6 43 ♗d5+ ♔h8 44 ♖xe5! fxe5 45 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 46 ♕xc8+ ♔g7 47 ♕e6 1-0

After 47...♕xe6 48 ♗xe6 ♔f6 49 ♗xc4 ♔f5 50 ♗xe5 ♔xe5 51 ♗xa6 White wins easily.



Ivanchuk – Bareev
Dubai (rapid) 2002

The position is blocked across almost the entire board, with just the kingside available for active play. White's space advantage gives him the better game, but he is forced to attack on a narrow front, which means that Black has fair defensive chances. This example demonstrates both of the main methods of opening lines: firstly White prepares g4 to open the g-file, and later he makes the final breakthrough by means of a sacrifice.

23 ♕e2 ♖g8

The d7-knight blocks the action of Black's queenside pieces, so he clears the way to transfer the knight to the threatened kingside.

24 h3 ♘f8 25 g4 ♘fg6

For the moment White cannot make progress since the f5-square is adequately defended and playing g5 would leave White with too narrow a front to attack on. White therefore improves his position by doubling rooks.

26 ♖g2 ♖f8 27 ♖ag1

A key decision, offering a pawn to open lines on the kingside.

27...fxg4?!

Waiting with 27...♖c7 is better, since accepting the pawn gives White a dangerous attack along the h-file.

28 hxg4 ♘xf4

28...♖xf4? 29 ♖h2 ♖f8 30 ♖g3 followed by ♖gh3 gives White a very strong attack.

29 ♗xf4 ♖xf4 30 ♖h2 ♘g6 31 ♖g3 ♘f8

31...♔g8 32 ♕f1 ♘f8 33 ♕h3 g6 34 ♕h6 ♖ff7 35 ♔g2 followed by g5 and ♘g4 is also very unpleasant for Black.

32 g5

32 ♕e3! ♖ff7 33 ♖gh3 is even stronger, since 33...g6 34 g5 followed by ♘g4-f6 puts Black under intolerable pressure.

32...♔g8 33 ♘h3 ♖f5

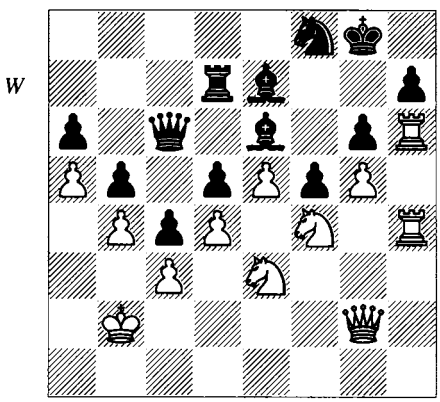
Black is forced to surrender the exchange, since 33...♖ff7 loses to 34 g6! ♘xg6 35 ♗xg6 hxg6 36 ♘hg5 followed by ♖gh3.

34 ♗xf5 exf5 35 ♘f4 ♕c6

Black has avoided immediate disaster but he remains totally passive. White now improves his position by stepping up the pressure against d5 and transferring his king to the queenside.

36 ♖gh3 g6 37 ♖h6 ♗e6 38 ♕g2 ♖g7 39 ♘e1 ♖d7 40 ♘c2 ♕b7 41 ♘e3 ♕c6 42 ♖2h4 ♗e7 43 ♔g1 ♗d8 44 ♔f1 ♗e7 45 ♔e2 ♗d8 46 ♔d2 ♗e7 47 ♔c2 ♗d8 48 ♔b2 ♗e7

48...♗c7 49 ♕h1! ♗d8 50 ♘xg6! hxg6 51 ♖h8+ ♔f7 52 ♖4h7+ ♔e8 53 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 54 ♕h6+ leads to a quick mate.



49 ♖xh7!

Opening lines by means of a sacrifice.

49...♘xh7 50 ♘xg6 ♗d8 51 ♘f4?!

51 ♖h6 and only then ♘f4 is immediately crushing.

51...♘xg5?

51...♘f8 is the only way to play on, although White can win by 52 ♖h6 ♖h7 53 ♘xf5 ♕d7 54 ♘xe6 ♘xe6 55 g6 ♖xh6 56 ♘xh6+ ♔f8 57 ♕f3+ ♔g7 58 ♕h5 followed by ♘f5+ or ♘f7.

52 ♖h6

Now it's all over since the open lines in front of Black's king prove fatal.

52...♖g7 53 ♘xf5 ♖f7 54 ♖xe6 ♕d7 55 ♖g6+ ♔f8 56 e6 ♕c7 57 ♘xd5 1-0

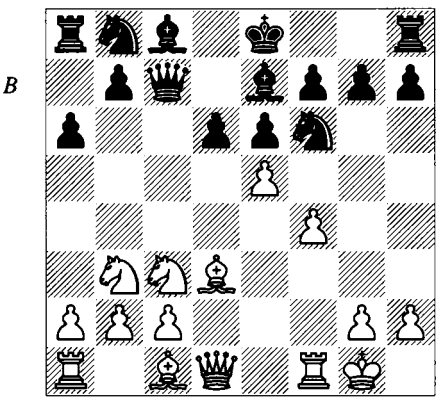
33 Positional Pawn Sacrifices

The sacrifice of a pawn involves a rather modest investment in material, so a pawn may be offered for less tangible benefits than a larger sacrifice, such as a lead in development or the weakening of the enemy pawn-structure.

Krivoruchko – Smirin
European Ch, Plovdiv 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♘c3 ♕c7 6 ♗d3 ♗c5 7 ♘b3 ♗e7 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 f4 d6 10 e5!?

White can continue with a quieter line such as 10 a4 or 10 ♕f3, but this positional pawn sacrifice is dangerous for Black. In return for the pawn, White obtains a lead in development and drives Black's queen offside, providing the foundation for a direct attack on the king.



10...dxe5

10...♘fd7?! 11 ♕g4 0-0 12 ♕h3 g6 13 exd6 ♗xd6 14 ♘e4 gives White attacking chances without any sacrifice.

11 fxe5 ♕xe5?!

Accepting the offer is risky; 11...♘fd7 is better, although after 12 ♕g4 g6 13 ♗h6 ♘xe5 14 ♕g3 White gets enough play for the pawn.

12 ♗f4 ♕h5 13 ♗e2 ♕h4?

A fatal error, but even after 13...♕g6 14 h4! Black is in trouble; e.g., 14...h6 15 h5 ♕h7 16 ♗d3 ♕g8 17 ♕e2 or 14...♘d5 15 ♗h5 ♘xc3 16 bxc3 ♕e4 17 ♗xb8 g6 18 ♗d6 gxh5 19 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 20 ♕xh5 with a winning attack for White.

14 g3 ♕h3 15 ♘e4!

Threatening 16 ♘xf6+ followed by 17 ♗g4. By keeping Black off-balance, White is able to trap Black's king in the centre.

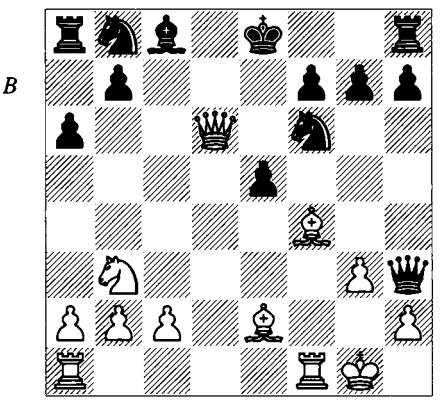
15...e5

15...♘xe4 16 ♗g4 costs Black his queen, while 15...♘bd7 16 ♘d4!, threatening to trap the queen by ♘g5 or ♘f2, leaves Black without any good defence.

16 ♘d6+!

A massive improvement over the previously-played 16 ♘g5. By offering a piece, White prevents Black from castling.

16...♗xd6 17 ♕xd6



17...♘bd7

Or 17...exf4 18 ♖ad1! ♘c6 19 ♗f3 ♗d7 (19...♗e6 20 ♗xc6+ bxc6 21 ♕xc6+ ♔e7 22 ♕d6+ ♔e8 23 ♖xf4 gives White a winning attack) 20 ♖fe1+ ♔d8 21 ♘c5 and Black's position crumbles.

18 ♖fe1 ♘e4

18...♕e6 19 ♗xe5 ♕xd6 20 ♗xd6 is winning for White despite the exchange of queens.

19 ♕b4 f5 20 ♗f3!

Renewing the piece offer in order to force open the e-file.

20...exf4 21 ♗xe4 fxe4 22 ♖xe4+ ♔d8

This loses at once, but even 22...♔f7 fails to 23 ♖e7+ ♔g6 24 ♕e4+ ♔h5 25 ♖f1 fxg3 26 ♕e2+ ♔g6 27 ♕d3+ ♔h6 28 ♕e3+ ♔h5 29 hxg3, and Black's king is hopelessly exposed.

23 ♖d1

Threatening 24 ♕b6#.

23...♕h6 24 ♖d6 1-0

Positional pawn sacrifices can be very long-term. In the following example a pawn is offered for compensation which is only exploited 20 moves later.

So – Navara

Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘f3 ♗g7 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 ♗g2 ♘b6 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 e3 0-0 9 0-0 ♖e8 10 ♖e1 a5 11 ♕e2 a4

11...♗e6 is probably more accurate, as in Leitão-Caruana on page 31.

12 ♖d1 ♗e6?!

Now this is risky, as it allows White to make a dangerous pawn sacrifice. 12...♗g4 is safer.

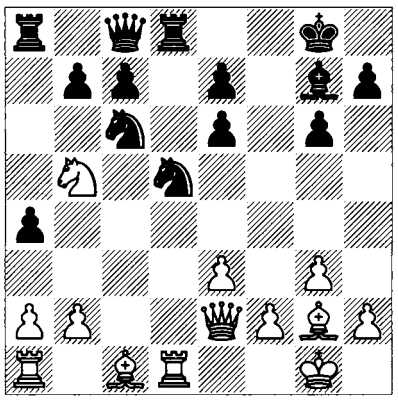
13 d5!

By offering a pawn, White seizes the initiative.

13...♘xd5 14 ♘b5

Threatening 15 e4, so the queen has to move.

14...♕c8 15 ♘g5 ♖d8 16 ♘xe6 fxe6



In return for the pawn, White has secured the two bishops and inflicted permanent damage on Black's pawn-structure. There is no immediate attack for White, but his positional compensation definitely outweighs the extra material.

17 ♖b1 ♔h8 18 ♗h3

The straightforward 18 e4 ♘f6 19 ♗e3 is also promising.

18...♘f6 19 ♗d2 ♖a6?!

It doesn't take much to make a position like this go downhill, and here Black should prefer 19...♘e4, heading for d6 to displace the powerful knight from b5.

20 ♗c3

An exchange of dark-squared bishops would remove Black's best minor piece.

20...♖d5 21 ♖xd5 ♘xd5 22 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 23 ♕c4

Threatening to win a piece with 24 ♕xd5, and taking indirect aim at the e6- and c7-pawns.

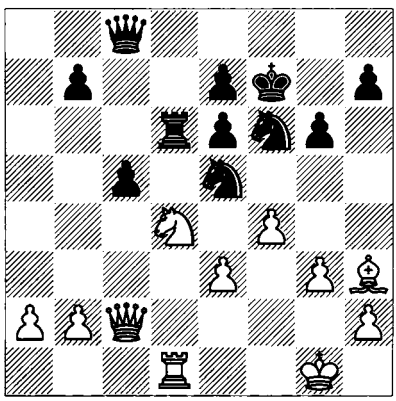
23...♘f6 24 ♖d1

After 24 ♗xe6?! ♘e5! 25 ♗xc8 ♘xc4 26 ♖c1 ♘d6 27 ♘xd6 cxd6 Black has more defensive chances.

24...♔f7 25 ♕f4!

Playing more slowly by 25 a3! is also good, so that after 25...♖b6 26 ♘c3 White can take on a4 with the knight (26...♖xb2? 27 ♘xa4 costs Black material).

25...♖b6 26 ♕xa4 ♘e5 27 ♘d4 c5 28 ♕c2 ♖d6 29 f4!?



29...♘eg4

Forced, since 29...♘ed7? loses to 30 ♘xe6! ♖xe6 31 ♗xe6+ ♔xe6 32 ♕c4+ ♔f5 33 e4+! ♘xe4 34 ♕d5+.

30 ♖e1 b6?

30...♖d5 was the last chance, although after 31 b4 b6 32 ♘f3 Black remains under heavy pressure.

31 ♘f3 ♕d7

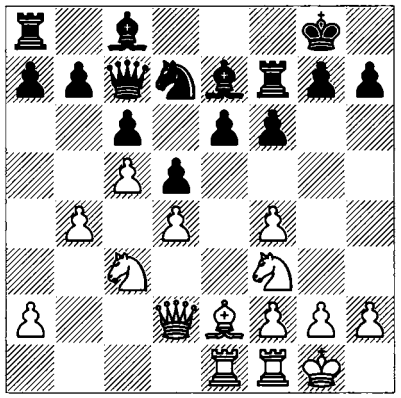
Black cannot avoid material loss since there is no good way to meet the threats of 32 e4 and 32 ♘e5+. For example, 31...♖d8 32 ♕c4 ♔g7 33 e4 is decisive.

32 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 33 h3

Winning a piece.

33...♘xe3 34 ♖xe3 1-0

34 Liberating Moves



Grishchuk – Gelfand
Candidates (5), Kazan 2011

Black has a backward e-pawn on a half-open file, and in addition his light-squared bishop is bad. This should add up to an advantage for White, but everything depends on whether Black can achieve the liberating move ...e5. If he can play this, then at a stroke the two problems mentioned above will disappear. For the next phase of the game the battle lines are drawn, with both sides focusing their pieces on e5.

13...♘f8

The immediate 13...e5? is bad due to 14 dxe5 fxe5 15 ♘xd5! cxd5 16 ♕xd5 ♘f8 17 ♘xe5 ♗e6 18 ♕e4 ♖f6 19 ♗c4, when White has three pawns and a dangerous initiative for the piece.

14 ♗d3 ♗d7 15 g3 ♖e8 16 ♖e3 ♗d8 17 ♖fe1

At the moment White has five pieces controlling e5, while Black has only three. However, Black can also increase his total to five by playing ...♕b8, ...♗c7 and ...♖fe7. Thus in the long run White might have to aim another piece at e5 to prevent the liberating advance.

17...♕b8 18 ♘a4!

A good move, clearing c3 for the queen and opening up the possibility of ♘b2-d3 to bring yet more force to bear on e5. White also has to think in the longer term. If he manages to prevent ...e5, there remains the question as to how he is going to improve his position. The most logical plan is to aim for a4 and b5 to create a second area of active play on the queenside. Black, in his cramped position, would have trouble fending off threats in two different parts of the board.

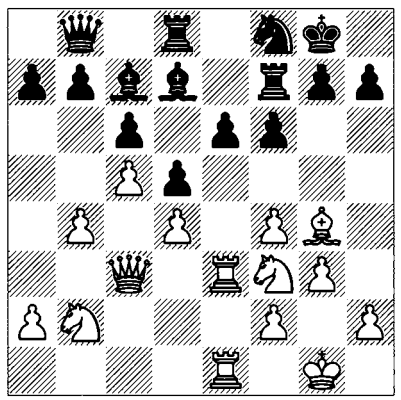
18...♗c7 19 ♘b2 ♖fe7 20 ♕c3 ♖d8

Realizing that he cannot force through ...e5 directly, Gelfand tries another idea. He intends ...♗e8-h5xf3 to exchange his bad bishop and weaken White's grip on e5.

21 ♗f5

This doesn't achieve anything, but it isn't a mistake in itself. It's surprisingly hard for White to make progress while maintaining his grip on e5. For example, if he plays 21 a4 ♗e8 22 b5 ♗h5 23 ♘h4 then Black can again liberate himself by 23...e5, since the complicated line 24 ♘f5 ♖f7 25 fxe5 fxe5 26 dxe5 ♘e6 27 ♕c2 ♖df8 gives him active play for the pawn.

21...♖f7 22 ♗g4?!



This allows Black to free his position. White should have returned to d3 and tried another plan.

22...e5! 23 ♗xd7 exf4 24 ♗e8 fxe3 25 ♕xe3 ♘g6 26 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7 27 ♕e6+ ♔f8 28 ♕h3

The only try, as otherwise Black plays ...♖e8.

28...♕c8!

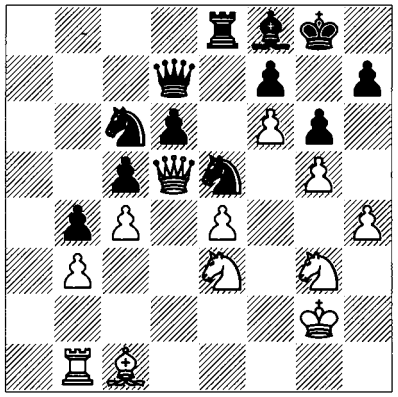
Gelfand is alert and takes the opportunity to snuff out any chances for White.

29 ♕xc8

29 ♕xh7? loses material after 29...♔f7 30 ♕h5 ♖h8 since White must give up an exchange to save his queen.

29...♖xc8 30 ♔f1 ♖e8 31 ♖b1 ♔e7 32 ♘d3 a6 33 a4 ♔d7 34 b5 axb5 35 axb5 cxb5 36 ♖xb5 ♖b8 37 ♘b4 ♘e7 38 ♘e1 ♘c6 39 ♘xc6 ½-½

W



Ikonnikov – Maiwald
Havana 2004

Liberating moves aren't always as obvious as in the previous example. In this position, White's kingside pawn advance has left Black's bishop buried on f8, but White's king is also looking a little draughty so he has to take care. Moreover, Black has a firmly entrenched knight on e5. On balance, White should be slightly better, since for the moment Black is playing almost a piece down, but the position requires careful handling.

35 ♕d1?

If White had foreseen the reply, he would never have moved his queen away from d5. 35 ♗b2 is better, threatening ♖a1, although Black can seek counterplay with the neat continuation 35...♘d4! 36 ♗xd4 ♘d3, the point being that 37 ♖f1 cxd4 38 ♕xd4 ♘c5 awkwardly attacks b3 and e4.

35...d5!

With four white pieces controlling d5, White probably never even considered this move, but it proves surprisingly effective. By giving up a pawn, Black gets his bishop to d6, where it points at White's rather bare kingside.

36 ♘xd5

There's no good line for White:

1) 36 ♕xd5? ♕c8 37 ♕d1 ♘d4 38 ♘e2 ♘ef3 gives Black a decisive attack.

2) 36 exd5? ♘d4 threatening 37...♘ef3 gives Black a very strong attack.

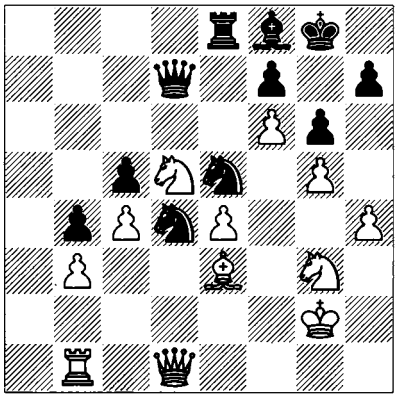
3) 36 cxd5 ♘d4 37 ♗b2 ♘ef3 38 ♗xd4 ♘xh4+ 39 ♔h2 cxd4 40 ♘g4 h6! 41 gxh6 g5 followed by ...♗d6 and Black stands better.

36...♘d4

Threatening 37...♘ef3, attacking h4 and preparing ...♕g4.

37 ♗e3

B



37...♘ec6?!

This unnecessarily passive move lets White back into the game. 37...♘ef3! 38 ♗xd4 ♘xh4+ 39 ♔h2 cxd4 followed by ...♗d6 is very unpleasant for White. Note how in every line the effects of the liberating ...d5 are felt, and how strong the bishop is once it arrives on d6.

38 ♗xd4

It looks risky to surrender the dark-squared bishop, but this move isn't bad if followed up correctly. 38 h5 ♗d6 39 hxg6 hxg6 40 ♗f4 also maintains the balance.

38...♘xd4 39 ♖a1 h5 40 ♘e3?

Now it's White who plays too passively. 40 gxh6 ♗d6 41 h5 gives him enough counterplay.

40...♗d6

Now Black gets a grip on the dark squares and starts to exert increasing pressure on White's position.

41 ♘ef1 ♕e6 42 ♖a2 ♕e5 43 ♔h3

43 ♖f2 prevents the queen from penetrating to f4, but after 43...♖a8 followed by ...♖a3 White's position collapses in any case.

43...♕f4

Black is now winning and Maiwald finishes efficiently.

44 ♖a6 ♗e5 45 ♖a7 ♖f8 46 ♖e7 ♘f3 47 ♕d7

Or 47 ♔g2 ♘xh4+ 48 ♔h3 ♘f3 49 ♔g2 ♘xg5 and Black wins.

47...♗d4! 48 ♘h1 ♕xh4+ 0-1

It's mate after 49 ♔g2 ♘e1#.

35 Positional Exchange Sacrifices

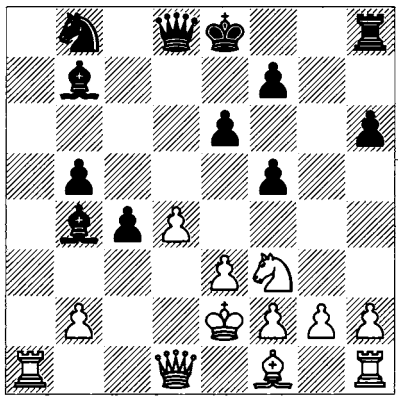
Van Wely – Topalov
Wijk aan Zee 2006

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 a6 5 a4 e6 6 ♗g5 h6 7 ♗h4 dxc4 8 e3?!

This is doubtful as the ensuing exchange sacrifice is promising for Black. Instead White should try 8 e4 or 8 a5.

8...b5! 9 axb5 cxb5 10 ♗xf6 gxf6 11 ♘xb5 axb5 12 ♖xa8 ♗b4+ 13 ♔e2 ♗b7 14 ♖a1 f5

W



Black has sacrificed a whole exchange, but has sufficient compensation based on his active bishops and White's poor king position. However, White is not without chances. He has no real weaknesses and if he can untangle his pieces then his material advantage will prove decisive.

15 ♘e5?!

Already a slip. 15 ♖g1 is more flexible, threatening g3 followed by ♗g2.

15...♖g8 16 f4

White wants to free f2 for his king, but 16 f3? is bad due to 16...f6. However, the move played seriously weakens e4.

16...♘c6 17 ♘f3

17 ♘xc6 ♗xc6 18 ♔f2 e5! gives Black a dangerous attack since 19 dxe5? ♕h4+ 20 ♔g1 ♗c5 and 19 fxe5? ♕h4+ 20 ♔g1 ♕e4 both win for Black.

17...♘a5 18 ♔f2 ♘b3 19 ♖a7 ♗e4?!

19...♕b6 20 ♖a2 ♔e7 is sounder.

20 ♖a2?

Too passive. 20 g3! gives Black far more problems justifying his sacrifice.

20...e5!!

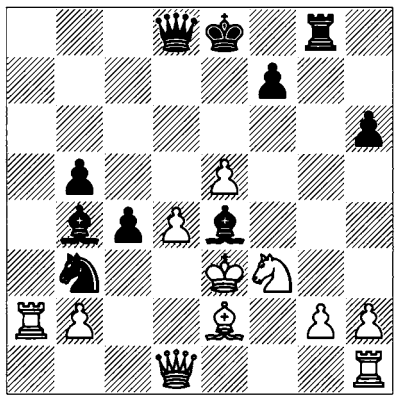
A brilliant breakthrough which gives Black a clear advantage in every line.

21 fxe5 f4 22 ♗e2

22 exf4? loses to 22...♗xf3 23 gxf3 ♗d2.

22...fxe3+ 23 ♔xe3

B



23...♕d5?!

23...♗b7 24 ♔f2 ♕b6 is very strong.

24 g3

24 ♖g1? ♘xd4! 25 ♘xd4 ♕xe5 26 ♘f3 ♗xf3+ 27 ♔xf3 ♕f5+ 28 ♔e3 ♗c5+ 29 ♔d2 ♖g6 gives Black a winning attack.

24...♘xd4?!

24...♖g4! followed by ...♗f5 retains some advantage for Black.

25 ♘xd4?

25 ♖a8+! ♕xa8 26 ♕xd4 ♗f5 27 ♖d1 returns the material to bring White's pieces into play. After this both kings are equally exposed, so Black can no longer claim any advantage.

25...♗xh1 26 ♗f3 ♕xe5+ 27 ♔f2 ♗c5 28 ♗xh1 ♗xd4+ 29 ♔f1 ♖g5

White is in grave difficulties as Black is a pawn up and retains a strong initiative.

30 ♗f3 ♔f8 31 ♔g2 ♕e3 32 ♔h3 ♔g7?!

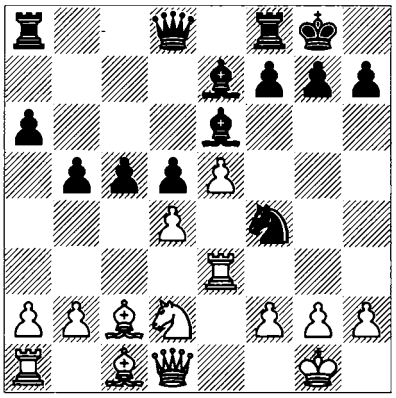
32...♕f2 33 ♕e2 ♕xe2 34 ♗xe2 ♖f5 followed by ...♖f2 gives Black a winning ending.

33 b3 cxb3 34 ♖a3 b4 35 ♖xb3 ♗c3 36 ♕e2 ♕c5 37 ♕d3?! ♕c8+ 38 ♔g2 ♖a5 39 ♕c2 ♕e6 40 ♕b1?

40 h4 puts up more resistance.

40...♖a1 41 ♕c2 ♗d4 42 ♗d1 ♕e1 43 ♗f3 ♕f1# (0-1)

W



Z. Almasi – Erdos
Croatian Team Ch, Šibenik 2008

This Open Ruy Lopez position looks satisfactory for Black. He has already challenged White's centre by playing ...c5, while White's queenside pieces are still stuck at home. However, White found his one opportunity to play for an advantage.

16 ♖g3!?

Threatening 17 ♘b3, attacking f4 and c5.

16...♗h4?!

Black probably expected White to move his rook, but that wasn't Almasi's idea. 16...cxd4 17 ♘f3 d3! 18 ♗xd3 ♘xd3 19 ♕xd3 ♖e8 20 ♗h6 g6 is sounder, with a roughly equal position.

17 ♘f3!

This is the surprise. While the exchange sacrifice isn't entirely clear-cut, it gives White the initiative and the pressure is then on Black to defend accurately.

17...♗xg3 18 hxg3 ♘g6 19 dxc5

In return for the exchange, White has a passed pawn and control of the dark squares. However, the main point is that Black's pieces aren't very active because there are no open files for the rooks, while the knight is sidelined on g6. Objectively, the position is only very slightly better for White, but even a small inaccuracy could land Black in serious trouble.

19...♗g4 20 ♕d4 ♕d7

A good defence, moving Black's bishop and queen to more active squares and preparing to bring the rooks into play.

21 ♗xg6

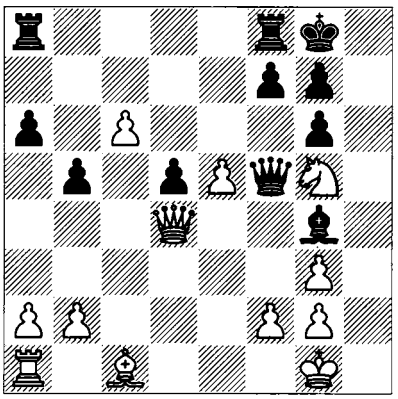
A surprising but good move. Black was threatening to exert awkward pressure on e5 after ...♖fe8, so by eliminating the knight White not only gains time but also reduces Black's possibilities for counterplay. 21 c6? is wrong as Black can reply 21...♕xc6 22 ♗xg6 ♕xg6.

21...hxg6 22 c6 ♕f5

More or less forced as 22...♕c8?! 23 ♘g5 leaves Black without a good way to defend the d5-pawn; for example, 23...♗e6? loses to 24 ♕h4.

23 ♘g5

B



The key move, threatening to trap the bishop by 24 f3.

23...♖fe8?!

Black should try 23...♖ac8 24 f3 ♖xc6 25 ♗f4! ♗h5 (25...♖c4 26 fxg4 ♖xd4 27 gxf5 gxf5 28 ♘f3 ♖e4 29 ♖d1 gives White an endgame advantage thanks to the weak d-pawn) 26 g4 ♗xg4 27 fxg4 ♕xg4 28 ♖f1 ♖c4, although after 29 ♕d2 White retains an advantage, again due to the weak d-pawn.

24 ♗f4

Now the rook can come to c1 and the c-pawn starts to look like a major menace, while Black's bishop remains sidelined.

24...♗e2 25 c7 ♖ac8 26 ♖c1 b4?

It's all over after Black gives up the d5-pawn. The best try is 26...♕d3, but 27 ♕b6 ♗g4 28 ♕xa6 ♕e2 29 b3 retains a large advantage for White.

27 ♕xd5 ♗b5 28 ♘e4 g5 29 ♘xg5 ♖e7 30 ♕d8+ ♖e8 31 ♕d6 ♕d3 32 ♕xb4

Harvesting yet another pawn.

32...f6 33 ♘f3 fxe5 34 ♗xe5 ♕d5 35 ♕g4 ♕f7 36 ♖d1 ♗c6 37 ♘g5 ♕g6 38 ♕c4+ ♔h8 39 ♖d4 1-0

36 Other Positional Sacrifices

Lopez Martinez – del Rio
La Roda 2009

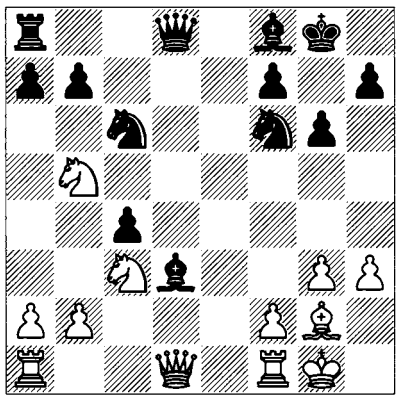
1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 c4 d6 4 ♘c3 e5 5 ♘ge2 c6 6 ♗e3 ♘f6 7 h3 exd4 8 ♘xd4 0-0 9 g3 d5 10 exd5 cxd5 11 ♗g2

White offers a pawn to further his development, but while this is sufficient to maintain the balance he is unlikely to gain any advantage.

11...dxc4 12 ♘db5 ♘c6 13 0-0 ♗f5!

The first positional sacrifice. The d3-square is an obvious weak point, but by playing to occupy it straight away, Black must be prepared to give up the exchange.

14 ♗c5 ♗d3 15 ♗xf8 ♗xf8



A typical positional sacrifice. Black has no immediate attack, but he has activated his pieces and gained time, while White's b5-knight will now have to retreat to the offside square a3.

16 ♖e1 a6 17 ♘a3 ♘d4

Keeping the a3-knight inactive.

18 ♖c1 ♗h6

In order for Black's piece activity to be converted into a direct attack, he must provoke weaknesses in White's position. After this move White must either return his rook to a1 or play f4, creating targets on the kingside.

19 f4

19 ♖a1 is very strongly met by 19...b5!, offering a second exchange. If White takes on a8 then he faces a deadly check on f3, while in any case the advancing b-pawn will wreak havoc.

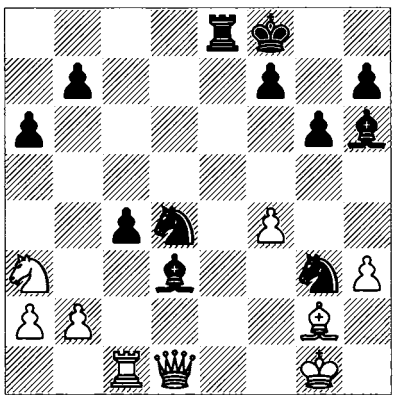
19...♘h5

A well-calculated decision. Black immediately exploits the weakness on g3, even though this allows White a measure of counterplay.

20 ♘d5 ♘xg3!

Black simply ignores the threat of ♖e8+.

21 ♖e8+ ♕xe8 22 ♘f6+ ♔f8 23 ♘xe8 ♖xe8



Now Black has two minor pieces and two pawns for the queen, which would normally not be enough, but look at the activity of his minor pieces! The immediate threat is 24...b5.

24 ♖xc4 ♗xc4 25 ♘xc4

This is the only chance, since at least it brings the offside knight back into play. However, Black's active pieces and dark-square pressure give him a large advantage.

25...b5! 26 ♔f2

There's no good square for the knight; for example, 26 ♘d2 ♗xf4 27 ♘b3 ♘de2+ 28 ♔f2 ♗e3+ or 26 ♘e5 ♘ge2+ 27 ♔h1 ♗xf4 28 ♘d3 ♘g3+ 29 ♔g1 ♘de2+ with a decisive attack for Black in both cases.

26...♘gf5 27 ♘d6 ♖e2+!

Since 28 ♔g1 loses to 28...♖xg2+, White has to surrender his queen, but there's a bit more to Black's play than that.

28 ♕xe2 ♘xe2 29 ♘xf5 ♘xf4 30 ♘xh6 ♘xg2 31 ♘g4

The key point is that 31 ♔xg2 f5 32 ♔f3 ♔g7 leads to a winning king and pawn ending.

31...♘f4 32 ♔e3 ♘xh3 33 ♘e5 f5 34 b4 g5 35 ♘d3 g4 36 ♘c5 f4+ 37 ♔e4 f3 38 ♔e3 f2 39 ♔e2 g3 40 ♔f1 ♘g5 41 ♔e2 ♘f3 42 ♘e4 ♘h2 0-1

Anand – Wang Hao

Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 f3 d5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 dxc5 ♕a5 9 e4 ♘e7 10 ♗e3 0-0 11 ♕b3 ♕c7 12 ♗b5 ♘ec6 13 ♘e2 ♘a5 14 ♕b4

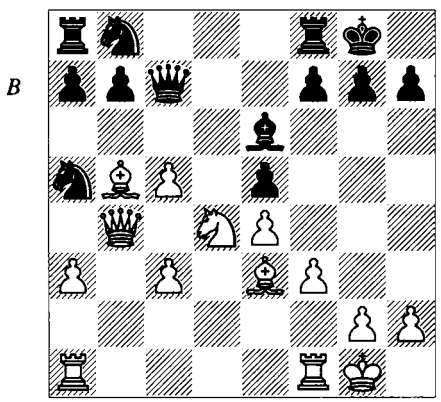
Kramnik had played 14 ♕a4 against Wang Hao the previous day, but 14...a6 15 ♗d3 ♘d7 16 ♗c2 ♘xc5 was comfortable for Black.

14...e5 15 0-0 ♗e6?

15...♘a6 16 ♗xa6 bxa6 17 ♖fd1 ♗e6 was satisfactory for Black in Moskalenko-Delchev, Benidorm 2007. Doubtless Anand had an improvement ready, but at the time of writing he has not revealed it.

The move played looks natural enough, and indeed 16 ♖fd1 ♗b3 17 ♖d6 ♘bc6 18 ♗xc6 bxc6 19 c4 ♖ab8 caused Black no problems in Cebalo-Marinković, Budva 2009. However, Anand has other ideas.

16 ♘d4!



This positional sacrifice of a piece for two pawns, which was part of Anand's preparation for his 2008 world championship match against Kramnik, gives White good practical chances.

16...exd4

Acceptance is forced, as 16...♗d7 17 ♘f5 gives White a clear advantage.

17 cxd4

Two pawns are normally not enough for a piece, but here White has several positional advantages. The two pawns are part of a powerful central pawn-mass, he controls far more space, his bishops are very active and finally Black's a5-knight is stuck offside. Notice how these are all positional factors, and similar advantages often form the basis for positional sacrifices.

17...♘bc6

17...a6 18 ♗e2 ♖e8 prevents d5 for the moment, but after 19 ♕c3 ♘d7 20 ♖ab1 White maintains the pressure.

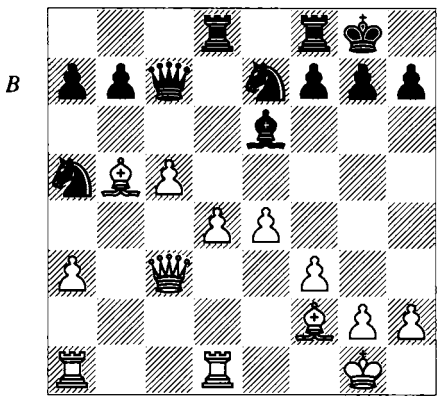
18 ♕c3 ♘e7

Preparing a counter-sacrifice after 19 d5? ♗xd5, but White simply reinforces his pawns.

19 ♖fd1 ♖ad8?!

The wrong rook. 19...♖fd8 is better, when 20 ♗f2 ♘ac6 21 ♖ab1 gives White some advantage, but nothing clear.

20 ♗f2



20...a6?

Now Black is lost. 20...♘ac6? is also bad in view of 21 ♗g3 ♕a5 22 ♕xa5 ♘xa5 23 ♗d6 and White wins material (this is where White exploits the position of the rook on f8). 20...b6! is best, since after 21 c6 a6 22 ♗xa6 ♘axc6 23 d5 ♗xd5 24 exd5 ♖xd5 Black can at least fight, although White has a substantial advantage due to his two bishops.

21 ♗g3 ♕c8 22 ♗f1 b6

The a5-knight will cost Black material since 22...♘ac6 loses to 23 ♗d6 followed by d5.

23 ♖ab1 ♘b3 24 ♖xb3 ♗xb3 25 ♕xb3 bxc5 26 d5

White is winning as his pieces are far more active than Black's, the c5- and a6-pawns are weak and White has a dangerous passed d-pawn.

26...♘g6 27 ♕b6 f5 28 ♗xa6 ♕d7 29 ♗b5 ♕f7 30 exf5 ♕xf5 31 ♕xc5 ♖c8 32 ♕d4 ♖fd8 33 a4 1-0

Attacking Play

Many players will find this the most entertaining part of the book, and indeed it contains many examples of brilliant attacking play. However, attacking ability is only one of many important middlegame skills, and being able to handle all types of position well gives you much more flexibility in choosing a plan. With that caveat, let's move on to the fun part.

Beginners are well advised to castle as quickly as possible, and it's surprising how many grandmasters run into trouble through getting their king trapped in the centre. Bacrot-Mamedyarov (page 102) is a good example. Although in most cases early castling is desirable, there are exceptions. Hillarp Persson-Tiviakov (page 103) is typical. Even before Black castled, White started gearing up for a kingside attack. Tiviakov realized that castling into the teeth of White's offensive would be suicidal, but by keeping his king in the centre he was able to exploit the weaknesses created by White's early pawn advances.

The next few sections deal with typical attacking ideas against kingside castled positions. The ♗xh7+ sacrifice (...♗xh2+ for Black) is one of the most common ways of breaking open the kingside and it occurs regularly at all levels of play. After the typical follow-up in which Black plays ...♔xh7 and White continues ♘g5+, Black has to choose between ...♔g8 or ...♔g6 (...♔h6 is only possible in rare cases). Egiazarian-Asrian (page 104) is an example of the retreat to the first rank. The soundness of a ♗xh7+ sacrifice often depends on the number of supporting units. The queen and knight are usually essential, but in addition (assuming it is White making the sacrifice) there may be a rook on e1, pawn on e5 and bishop on c1 or f4 to back up the sacrifice. The more of these supporting units are in place, the more likely the sacrifice is to be correct. In this example the sacrifice was sound because Black's b7-bishop was a good supporting unit, while White's pieces were clumsily placed. In Moiseenko-I.Novikov (page 105), the king came out to g6, but this was refuted by an unexpected blow on the queenside (see also Section 20, 'Using the Whole Board'). The next two examples feature some unusual ♗xh7+ sacrifices. In Nguyen Ngoc-Kanep (page 106), the sacrifice was correct even though White lacked any of the usual supporting units, while in Smirin-Voloshin (page 107) taking on h7 proved deadly even without the standard ♘g5+ follow-up.

Another potential weak spot is g7, and this is a common target of kingside attacks. In many positions, pieces can flow naturally to attack g7, for example by ♕e1-g3 or by moving a knight to f5. In Shengelia-Beletsky (page 108), the queen on g3 was coupled with a bishop on b2 and a rook on the seventh to create lethal threats. Mamedov-Shomoev (page 109) featured a different combination of attacking units, with a knight on f5 and bishop on the long diagonal.

The next two sections cover sacrifices on other kingside squares. If Black has played ...h6, then a ♗xh6 sacrifice may be feasible, obtaining two pawns and an attack for the piece. Again, the number of supporting pieces is often the key factor. In Almasi-Mikhalevski (page 110), White could switch a rook decisively to the kingside, but Radjabov-Svidler (page 111) is a marginal case, in which White has just enough resources to make the sacrifice correct. The weakness of f7 is well-known, and this can be a target either before or after castling. Kempinski-Postny (page 112) is an example of a sacrifice on f7 exposing an uncastled king, while Maiorov-Borovikov (page 113) shows the analogous case with the king castled.

Some sacrifices are associated with particular openings, and the ♘d5 sacrifice in the Sicilian is one such. E.Berg-Li Chao (page 114) is a clear-cut example in which the soundness of the sacrifice is not in doubt, while Maslak-Grandelius (page 115) is a marginal case in which the chances remain balanced after the sacrifice. Stellwagen-Naiditsch (page 116) is an example of a correct ♗xe6 sacrifice, but victory is not automatic with such sacrifices, and Radjabov-Gelfand (page 117) shows a successful defence. Another Sicilian-based sacrifice is that involving ♘f5, and Azarov-Jobava (page 118) is a typical example in which the sacrifice is used to trap the enemy king in the centre.

The ♘f5 sacrifice sometimes turns up unexpectedly and can work even if Black has already castled; Volokitin-Nevednichy (page 119) is a case in point.

White is not the only player who can sacrifice in the Sicilian, although Black's options are more limited. The most important possibility is the ...♖xc3 exchange sacrifice and Abergel-Negi (page 120) is a clear-cut example in which Black's attacking chances offered excellent compensation. Shirov-Anand (page 121) is a marginal case in which White has some counterplay.

The following sections deal with more general attacking concepts. Positions with opposite-side castling often feature a race between competing attacks on the flanks. Ivanchuk-Gelfand (page 122) shows how an attack needs to be well-supported by pieces, and in this example Black's attack led only to a check, while White's resulted in mate. Every tempo counts in these situations, and Sax-Gallagher (page 123) shows that it may be necessary to sacrifice to get in ahead of the opponent.

Playing a rook along the third rank is an essential part of some attacks, one example being Shariyazdanov-Petukhov (page 124), but if the attack fails then the rook may be misplaced, as in Radulski-Almasi (page 125).

One method of creating a weakness in the enemy king position is to advance a pawn. Sometimes, as in Van Oosterom-Bang (page 126), just one pawn is enough to do the job, while in other cases, such as B.Savchenko-Nikolenko (page 127), a whole phalanx of pawns is used to tear open the enemy king position.

Attacks are more likely to succeed if the attacker has more pieces than the opponent in the vicinity of the enemy king. Therefore it's important to make sure that all the available firepower is participating in the attack. In Vescovi-Radjabov (page 128), Black took time out to make sure that his rooks were able to join in the attack, while in the especially instructive example Zemerov-Krivko (page 129) White missed an opportunity to bring an offside rook to the kingside, and thus jeopardized the success of his attack. The other method of ensuring a numerical superiority in the main area of battle is to prevent defensive pieces from arriving at the scene. In Nunn-S.Williams (page 130), a surprising bishop move kept Black's rook offside, while in Zhao Jun-Xiu Deshun (page 131) a spectacular sequence of sacrifices allowed White to cut Black's position in half.

An attack often depends on an open file aimed at the enemy king position. Sometimes files are opened by pawn advances, but more drastic methods may prove necessary. In Aleksandrov-Sandipan (page 132), White offered a pawn, while Gonzalez Zamora-Zapata (page 133) is an even more dramatic example, since here White offered a whole piece to open the g-file.

A kingside fianchetto has both strengths and weaknesses. The main strength is that the bishop is often a good defender, but the attacker may be able to weaken the king position by using his h-pawn, or by exchanging the fianchettoed bishop. White's attack in Riazantsev-Kokarev (page 134) is based on opening the h-file and then tripling major pieces, while in Zablotsky-Khismatullin (page 135) White used a variety of techniques to expose Black's king.

The long diagonal leading to the enemy king position often provides a useful attacking avenue and a queen and bishop line-up may be decisive, as in Chatalbashev-Sarić (page 136). The game Nikolić-Baramidze (page 137) is a curious example in which both players were weak on the long diagonal.

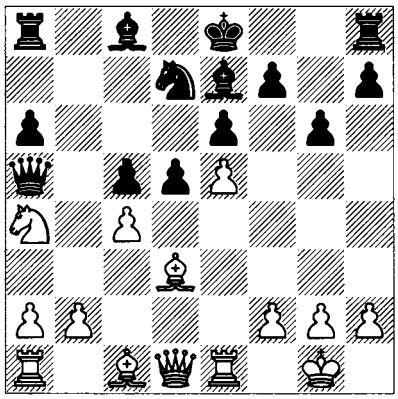
Not all sacrifices are clearly right or wrong – there is a considerable grey area in between. Mistakes are easily made in cases of marginal sacrifices, and in Nisipeanu-Reinderman (page 138) White missed a difficult winning line, but won anyway when Black overlooked his only saving chance. In Sutovsky-Kramnik (page 139), White's sacrifice was at most enough for equality, but even very strong players find a prolonged defence difficult and Kramnik allowed the attack to break through.

The remaining sections deal with heroic methods of prosecuting an attack. In Rapport-Rogić (page 140) and Svidler-Vallejo Pons (page 141), a whole series of sacrifices was necessary to punch through the enemy defences. The attacks in Beliavsky-Nakamura (page 142) and Motyliov-Radjabov (page 143) are notable because of their duration. Finally, the attacker sometimes needs considerable imagination to succeed. In Akopian – Vachier-Lagrave (page 144), a bizarre-looking bishop move was the key to the attack, while in Korobov-Vocaturo (page 145) a shocking rook sacrifice initiated a virulent attack.

37 King in the Centre

Bacrot – Mamedyarov
Nalchik 2009

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♘xc6 bxc6 7 ♗d3 d5 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 ♖e1 ♗e7 10 e5 ♘d7 11 ♕g4 g6 12 ♘a4 c5 13 c4 ♕a5 14 ♕d1



A critical moment.

14...dxc4?!

14...0-0 is risky because after 15 cxd5 exd5 16 b3 Black must constantly worry about the possibility of e6. Therefore it makes sense to prevent cxd5, but this is the wrong way to go about it as not only can White now keep Black's king in the centre, at least for a time, but he also has the d-file as a natural avenue of attack.

14...d4! is correct, when if White plays 15 ♗e4 ♖b8 16 ♗h6 then simply 16...♗f8 solves Black's problems. With the d-file closed and the knight sidelined on a4, White's attacking chances are not dangerous.

15 ♗e4 ♖b8 16 ♗h6

White's attack is far more important than Black's extra doubled pawn.

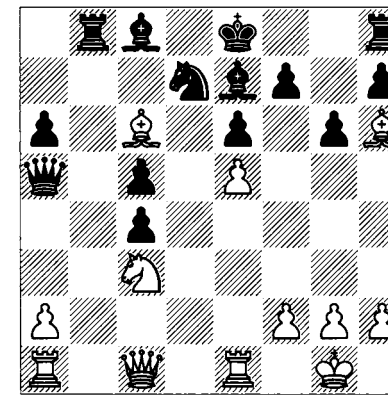
16...♖b4?

Playing to win the b-pawn is really going too far. 16...♗b7 or 16...♗f8 17 ♗d2 ♕c7 18 f4 ♗e7 is better, although White retains a modest advantage because once the c4-pawn falls, Black will have weak pawns on the queenside.

17 ♘c3 ♖xb2 18 ♕c1 ♖b8

18...♖b6 19 ♗d2! puts Black's queen in trouble.

19 ♗c6!



The transfer of the bishop to the a4-e8 diagonal pins the enemy king down in the centre.

19...♗b7

19...♗f8 20 ♗xf8 is crushing for White after 20...♔xf8 21 ♕h6+ ♔e7 22 ♘e4 or 20...♖xf8 21 ♘e4.

20 ♗a4 ♔d8

Black despairs of castling and tries to unpin his knight, but his outlook is grim.

21 ♖d1 ♗d5 22 ♕c2 ♖b4

Now Black hopes to relieve the pressure by giving up the exchange on a4, but this doesn't solve his problems.

23 ♗d2!

The bishop no longer needs to stay on h6 to prevent castling, so can switch to other duties.

23...♗a8

23...♖xa4 loses to 24 ♘xd5 ♕b5 25 ♘c3.

24 ♗e1 ♖xa4 25 ♘xa4 ♕b5

25...♕c7 26 ♘b2 ♗d5 27 ♘xc4 followed by ♘e3 leaves Black material down with his king still in a bad position.

26 ♖ab1 ♕c6 27 f3 ♔e8

This allows a lethal combination, but with the white rooks so active on the two open files there was no chance in any case.

28 ♖xd7! ♔xd7

28...♕xd7 29 ♖b8+ ♗d8 30 ♖xa8 is also winning for White.

29 ♕d1+ ♔c8

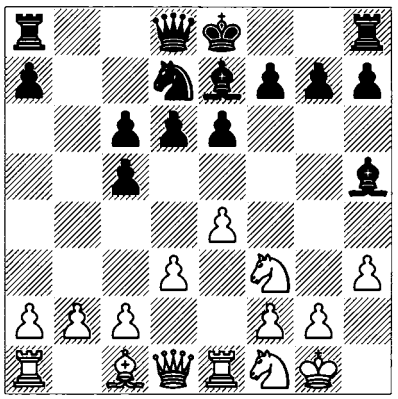
Even worse is 29...♔c7 30 ♗a5+.

30 ♘b6+ ♔b7 31 ♘d5+ 1-0

There normally has to be a powerful reason to keep your king in the centre longer than necessary, but sometimes it's a good idea.

Hillarp Persson – Tiviakov
European Union Ch, Liverpool 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 d6 4 ♗xc6+ bxc6 5 0-0 ♗g4 6 h3 ♗h5 7 ♖e1 e6 8 d3 ♘f6 9 ♘bd2 ♘d7 10 ♘f1 ♗e7



11 g4?!

White expands on the kingside with the aim of attacking Black's king after a later ...0-0. The problem with this one-sided plan is that Black is by no means committed to castling kingside, at least not in the near future. 11 ♘g3 ♗g6 12 b3 followed by ♗b2 is a less committal plan.

11...♗g6 12 ♘g3 f6!?

12...h5, aiming to open the h-file, is also possible, but Tiviakov's plan is very interesting. He is prepared to allow White to gain space on the kingside because, thanks to the relatively blocked centre, his king will be safe on e8.

13 ♘h4 ♗f7 14 f4

Castling into White's kingside pawn advance is clearly inadvisable, so Black slowly improves his position in the centre while not committing his king. If White pushes forward with his pawns to open lines, Black can castle queenside instead and exploit the open lines to attack White's king. This effectively stalls White's kingside play, giving Black time to improve his position and develop counterplay. Note that Black is not giving up the idea of kingside castling permanently, which would be a more serious concession. Indeed, it's quite possible that his king will eventually castle kingside, but only when it's safe to do so.

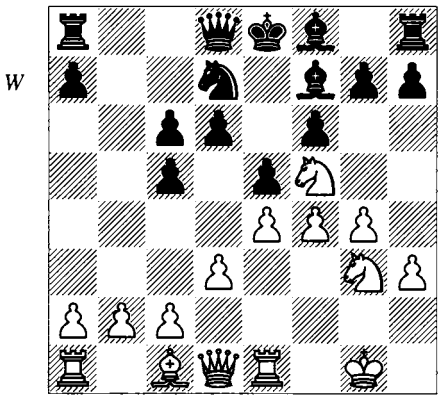
14...e5

Allowing a knight to occupy f5, but this is temporary as ...g6 will soon drive the knight away.

15 ♘hf5

15 f5 c4 16 ♘f3 cxd3 17 cxd3 d5 gives Black active play in the centre.

15...♗f8



16 fxe5

White decides to press on with his attack and arranges to meet ...g6 by ♘h6. Black also stands well if White retreats the knight; for example, after 16 ♖f1 g6 17 ♘e3 exf4 18 ♖xf4 ♗h6 19 ♖f1 0-0 20 ♕e2 d5 there's no trace of White's attack, while Black has central play backed up by his two bishops.

16...fxe5 17 ♕f3 g6 18 ♘h6

18 ♘e3 ♗g7 19 ♖f1 0-0 also favours Black.

18...♗e6

The knight is stuck on h6 and if White cannot support it then he will be in serious trouble.

19 ♖f1 ♕e7 20 ♔g2 ♗g7

Slowly but surely, Black develops his pieces and White's attack crumbles into ruins.

21 ♗e3 ♖b8 22 b3?

Opening the long diagonal turns out to have unfortunate consequences, but White was in bad shape in any case.

22...♖f8 23 ♕d1 ♖f4!

Winning material.

24 ♖xf4 exf4 25 ♗xf4 ♕f6 0-1

Black never did castle!

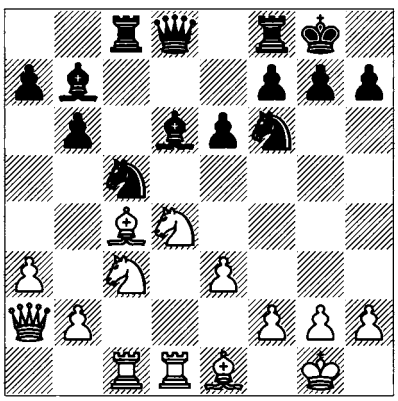
38 The ♗xh7+ Sacrifice (1)

The ♗xh7+ sacrifice (or ...♗xh2+ for Black) is one of the most common kingside attacking ideas and there are many simple cases in which the sacrifice is followed by ♘g5+ and ♕h5 (or ...♘g4+ and ...♕h4 for Black), with a quick mate or decisive gain of material. This scenario is so familiar that I need not give an example. However, there are many cases in which the sacrifice is sound even though it is not immediately decisive.

Egiazarian – Asrian
Armenian Ch, Erevan 2006

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘f3 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6 5 ♘c3 ♗b4 6 ♕b3 ♘a6 7 ♗d2 0-0 8 e3 b6 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 0-0 ♗e7 11 ♖fd1 ♖c8 12 ♖ac1 d5 13 a3?! ♘c5 14 ♕a2 dxc4 15 ♗xc4 ♗d6 16 ♗e1?

B



This position is typical: Black gains two pawns for the piece and chases the white king into the centre, after which his attack is worth far more than White's extra material.

16...♗xh2+!

The sacrifice is correct here. Even though Black lacks some of the supporting units that often make the sacrifice sound (such as a pawn on e4 or a rook ready to enter the attack), the power of the bishop on the long diagonal proves the deciding factor.

17 ♔xh2 ♘g4+ 18 ♔g1

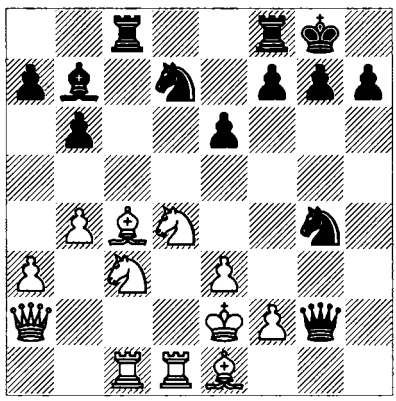
Retreating the king is the only chance. Sometimes the king can come out to g3 or h3, but here this leads to a quick loss after 18 ♔g3 ♘xe3! 19 ♘f3 (19 fxe3 ♕g5+ leads to mate) 19...♘xd1 20 ♖xd1 ♘e4+ 21 ♔h3 (21 ♔h2 ♕c7+) 21...♕f6 with a decisive attack for Black, or 18 ♔h3 ♕g5 19 ♘f3 ♕h5+ 20 ♔g3 ♗xf3 21 gxf3 ♕h2+ 22 ♔xg4 f5+ 23 ♔g5 ♕h6#.

18...♕h4

The f2-pawn is defended so there is no mate, but White cannot avoid the loss of the g2-pawn.

19 b4 ♕h2+ 20 ♔f1 ♕xg2+ 21 ♔e2 ♘d7

W



Threatening ...♘de5 followed by ...♗f3+. Black has a decisive advantage because most of his pieces are in attacking positions, while White suffers not only from his exposed king but also from the vulnerable position of his c4-bishop.

22 ♔d2

Trying to run away, but now Black picks up a third pawn.

22...♘xf2 23 ♗xf2 ♕xf2+ 24 ♗e2

24 ♘ce2 ♘e5 25 ♗xe6 ♘f3+ 26 ♔d3 ♖cd8! is also decisive.

24...♘e5

With multiple threats: 25...♘c4+, 25...♘f3+ or simply 25...♖fd8, bringing the last piece into the attack.

25 ♖f1 ♕h2

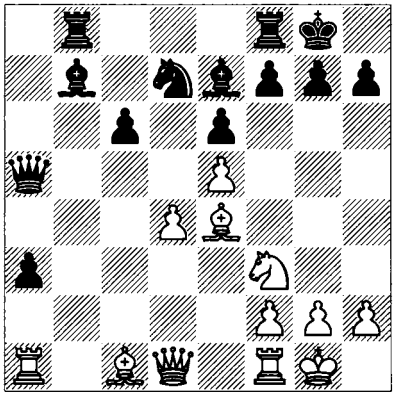
Not 25...♘c4+? losing to 26 ♕xc4, but Black can simply maintain the pin.

26 ♘cb5 ♗d5 27 ♕b1 ♘c4+ 28 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 29 ♘c3 ♖xc3! 30 ♔xc3 e5 31 ♘f5 ♕xe2 32 ♘e7+ ♔h8 33 ♖d1

33 ♘xd5 loses to 33...♖c8+ 34 ♔b3 ♕c4+.

33...♕c4+ 34 ♔d2 ♗f3 0-1

W



Moiseenko – I. Novikov
Montreal 2004

White has sacrificed a pawn but has a dangerous initiative with attacking chances against Black's poorly-defended kingside. This example shows that in some cases the main defence to the ♗xh7+ and ♘g5+ sacrifice is to play the king out to g6.

18 ♗xa3!

The start of a spectacular combination which combines play on the queenside with a direct kingside attack.

18...♗xa3?

Objectively speaking, Black should play 18...♕d8 but after 19 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 20 ♖a7 White has a large positional advantage based on his better pawn-structure and far more active pieces.

19 ♗xh7+!

Now that Black's bishop has been deflected from e7, White's knight has access to g5 and this sacrifice becomes possible.

19...♔xh7

You should always consider what happens if the sacrifice is declined, but here 19...♔h8 is refuted by 20 ♘g5 g6 21 ♕g4 ♔g7 22 ♘xe6+! ♔xh7 23 ♕h4+ ♔g8 24 ♘g5 followed by mate.

20 ♘g5+ ♔g6

Here 20...♔g8 is hopeless due to 21 ♕h5 ♖fe8 22 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 23 ♖ae1 followed by ♖e3, when Black is helpless despite his two extra pieces. Therefore the king must come out, but as 20...♔h6 loses to 21 ♕d3 ♘f6 (for 21...♔xg5 see the next note) 22 ♖xa3 ♕d5 23 exf6 ♕xg5 24 ♕e4, the move played is forced.

21 ♕d3+

Depending on the exact situation, the ...♔g6 defence may be met by ♕d3+, ♕g4 or h4. In this position the first possibility is strongest.

21...f5

21...♔xg5 loses after 22 f4+ (22 ♕h7 also wins) 22...♔h6 23 ♕h3+ ♔g6 24 f5+ exf5 25 ♖xf5 ♘f6 26 ♖af1! with decisive threats.

22 ♘xe6

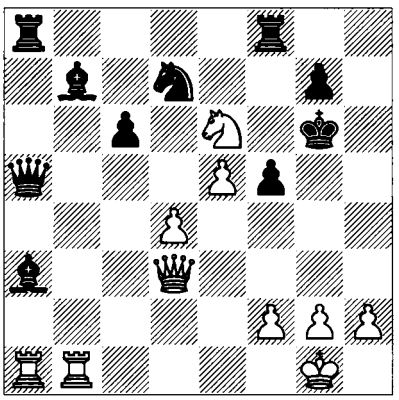
White is two pieces down rather than the usual one, but if he can regain a piece at a3 then he will have two pawns and a very strong attack for the remaining piece.

22...♖a8

Black tries to hang on to the a3-bishop. If instead 22...♖fe8, then 23 ♖xa3 ♕b4 24 ♘f4+ ♔h7 25 ♕xf5+ ♔g8 26 ♖h3 wins.

23 ♖fb1!

B



The key move since there is no good defence to the attack on the b7-bishop.

23...♖fb8

In Kasimdzhanov-Lesiège, Istanbul Olympiad 2000, Black played 23...♗c8, but this left the a8-rook undefended and Black resigned after 24 ♖b3, with the devastating threat of 25 ♖bxa3.

24 ♘f4+

Now that the f8-rook has abandoned the kingside, White can resume his attack on the king.

24...♔f7 25 ♕xf5+ ♔e7 26 ♕e6+ ♔d8 27 ♕g8+ ♘f8

27...♔c7 28 ♘e6# and 27...♔e7 28 ♘g6# are attractive mates.

28 ♘e6+ ♔c8 29 ♘xf8 ♕d8 30 ♖xa3 1-0

After 30...♖xa3 31 ♕e6+ ♔c7 32 ♕f7+ ♔c8 33 ♕f5+ ♔c7 34 ♘e6+ White takes the queen with check.

39 The ♗xh7+ Sacrifice (2)

Nguyen Ngoc – Kanep
Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010

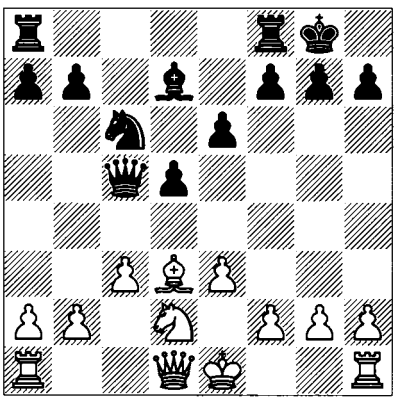
1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 c5 4 ♗f4 ♘c6 5 e3 d5 6 ♘bd2 ♗d6 7 ♗g3 0-0 8 ♗d3 ♕e7 9 ♘e5 ♘d7?!

A definite error. Black is about to fall into one of the most subtle opening traps known.

10 ♘xd7 ♗xd7?

Objectively speaking, 10...♕xd7 is better, because the same continuation as in the game, 11 ♗xd6?! (11 ♕c2 preserves an edge for White) 11...♕xd6 12 dxc5 ♕xc5 13 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 14 ♕h5+ ♔g8 15 ♘e4, only leads to a draw after 15...g6 16 ♕g5 ♕e7 17 ♘f6+ ♔g7 18 ♘h5+.

11 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 12 dxc5 ♕xc5



13 ♗xh7+!

It is amazing that this is correct since White appears to lack any supporting pieces for his attack. However, the knight can reach g5 with gain of tempo and White's threats are enough to tie Black down and give White enough time to bring his reserves into the attack.

13...♔xh7 14 ♕h5+ ♔g8 15 ♘e4

The pin along the fifth rank provides White with an important tempo.

15...♕c4

15...g6 16 ♘xc5 gxh5 17 ♘xd7 leaves White a pawn ahead, which shows why Black is worse off with his bishop on d7.

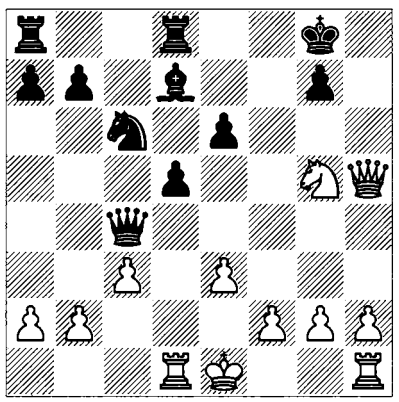
16 ♘g5 ♖fd8

16...♕d3 loses to 17 e4 ♖fd8 18 ♖d1 ♕c4 19 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 20 f4!, when Black cannot meet the threat of ♖f1-f3. It's interesting to see how White's queen and knight hold Black's forces in near-total paralysis.

17 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 18 ♕h5+

This is the best move, but 18 h4 is also strong. Then 18...♘e5 (18...♕d3 loses to 19 e4!, threatening 20 ♖h3) 19 ♕h5+ ♔g8 20 0-0-0 ♕xa2 21 ♕h7+ ♔f8 22 ♕h8+ ♔e7 23 ♕xg7+ ♔d6 24 ♘e4+ ♔c6 25 ♕xe5 ♕a1+ 26 ♔d2 ♕xb2+ 27 ♔e1 left White a pawn up with a continuing attack and a dangerous passed h-pawn in Prié-Svetushkin, French Team Ch 2009.

18...♔g8 19 ♖d1!



The most accurate continuation of the attack, ruling out the defensive possibility of ...♕d3. Here too Black is helpless against the rather slow threats of h4 and ♖h3, or even f4 and ♖f1-f3.

19...d4

19...b5 20 h4 and 19...♕xa2 20 0-0 are also dead lost for Black.

20 ♕f7+ ♔h8 21 h4 ♕d5

At this point White could have won simply by 22 e4 followed by ♖h3. Instead, he played **22 0-0? ♕f5 23 ♕xf5 exf5 24 ♘f7+ ♔g8 25 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 26 exd4**, which still gave him a large endgame advantage. White did eventually win, but only after allowing Black a drawing possibility: **26...♗e6 27 b3 ♔f7 28 ♖fe1 b5 29 ♔h2 a5 30 ♖d3 a4 31 ♖f3? axb3 32 axb3 b4 33 ♖fe3? ♗xb3 34 cxb4 ♗c4 35 ♖f3 ♔f6 36 ♖f4 ♘xd4?? 37 ♖ee4 ♘e6 38 ♖xc4 ♘xf4 39 ♖xf4 ♖d2 40 g3 ♖b2 41 ♔g2 g6 42 ♔f3 ♔e5 43 ♔e3 1-0**.

The bishop sacrifice on h7 doesn't have to be followed by ♘g5+. Another common motivation is to gain time to double major pieces on the h-file.

Smirin – Voloshin
Czech Team Ch 2003/4

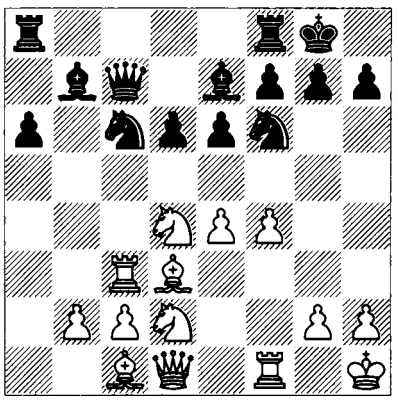
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5 ♘c3 ♕c7 6 ♗d3 ♘f6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♔h1 b5 9 f4 b4?!

9...d6 is more solid. Playing ...b4 gives White the chance to activate his a1-rook by a3.

10 ♘b1 ♗b7 11 ♘d2 d6 12 a3 bxa3 13 ♖xa3 ♘c6 14 ♖c3 0-0?

14...♖c8 is better, although White retains a positional advantage due to the weak a-pawn.

W



In this example, the ♗xh7+ sacrifice is initially rather disguised as the rook is hiding behind the bishop, which in addition currently has no clear path to h7.

15 e5!

Now the f6-knight has to move, after which everything is ready for the hammer blow on h7.

15...dxe5 16 fxe5 ♘d7

16...♕xe5 loses a piece, so Black is forced to remove a defender from the kingside. The alternative knight move 16...♘d5 is no better as White then wins by 17 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 18 ♕h5+ ♔g8 19 ♖h3 f5 (19...f6 20 ♘2f3 f5 21 ♘xe6 is also an easy win for White) 20 ♘xf5! ♖xf5 21 ♖xf5 exf5 22 e6 and Black is defenceless.

17 ♗xh7+!

Allowing the queen and rook to slot into place on the h-file without loss of time. Several other white pieces are positioned to join in the attack, so Black's chances look extremely poor.

17...♔xh7 18 ♕h5+ ♔g8 19 ♖h3 f6

After 19...f5 20 ♘xf5! White wins analogously to the note to Black's 16th move.

20 ♘4f3?!

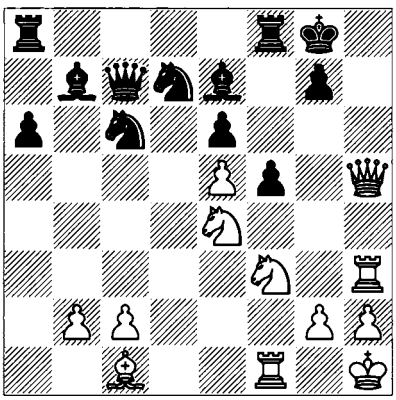
Good enough, but 20 ♘f5! is even more crushing, since after 20...♕xe5 (20...exf5 21 e6 mates) 21 ♘h6+ ♔h7 22 ♕g4 gxh6 23 ♘f3 ♕g5 24 ♗xg5 fxg5 25 ♕h5 ♖f6 26 ♘xg5+ it's mate in a few moves.

20...f5

The only reasonable defence to the threat of 21 ♘g5!.

21 ♘e4!

B



This neat move renews the threat of playing a knight to g5, so Black has to accept the sacrifice. However, opening the f-file allows White to win Black's queen with a series of checks.

21...fxe4 22 ♕h7+ ♔f7 23 ♘g5++ ♔e8 24 ♕g6+?!

24 ♕h5+! is more accurate, for reasons we shall see later.

24...♔d8 25 ♘xe6+ ♔c8 26 ♖xf8+ ♗xf8?

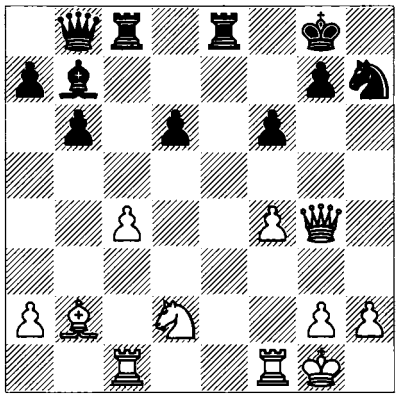
Black should play 26...♘xf8 (this attacks the queen, which is why the check on h5 would have been more accurate on move 24) 27 ♕e8+ ♕d8 28 ♘xd8 ♔c7!, followed by ...♖xd8. Objectively this is still winning for White, but at least Black can play on.

27 ♕e8+

This intermediary check finishes Black.

27...♘d8 28 ♘xc7 ♔xc7 29 e6 ♘xe6 30 ♕xe6 ♗d6 31 ♖c3+ ♘c5 32 ♗e3 ♖f8 33 ♕xd6+ 1-0

40 Disaster on g7



Shengelia – Beletsky
Bundesliga 2008/9

The position is roughly equal. White's queen and bishop are both aimed at g7 but for the moment Black's kingside is sufficiently defended and it is not easy for White to bring another piece into the attack. White also has to take care because, thanks to the advance of his f-pawn, his own g2-square is not totally secure and he must watch out for a possible ...♖e2.

22...d5

While this is not in itself a mistake, it is the start of a risky plan. Black should first of all take steps to safeguard his kingside before he considers active play of his own. This could be most easily achieved by 22...♕c7, followed by ...♕f7, guarding the f6- and g7-squares while at the same time taking aim at the isolated c4-pawn. A sense of danger is important in chess; even when there are no immediate threats to meet, it's often important to shore up fragile defences as an insurance against future tactical mishaps.

23 ♖c3 dxc4?!

This allows White to bring his knight to a more active position free of charge. 23...♕d6! is better, defending f6 and activating the queen. Then further attacking attempts by White would rebound; for example, 24 ♖g3?! ♕c5+ 25 ♔h1 ♖c7 26 cxd5 ♕xd5 and it is Black rather than White who has attacking chances.

24 ♘xc4

Thanks to the active position of White's knight, Black now faces the threat of 25 ♖g3 ♕c7 (25...♖e7 26 ♗a3 followed by ♘d6 is also a win) 26 ♘d6, winning material.

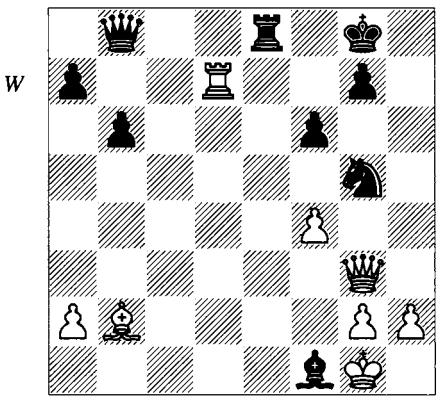
24...♖xc4?

Black attempts to solve his problems tactically, but this move fails because it gives White a new opportunity to attack g7. By this stage, accurate defence is necessary and Black should play 24...♗a6 25 ♕d1 (25 ♖g3 ♖c7 is fine for Black) 25...♔h8! 26 ♕c2 (threatening 27 ♖h3) 26...♘f8! and White's threats peter out since he cannot easily reorganize his forces due to the pressure on the c4-knight.

25 ♖xc4 ♗a6 26 ♖d4!

This is the refutation: by giving up the f1-rook, White gains time to penetrate to d7 for a lateral attack on the sensitive g7-square.

26...♗e2 27 ♕g3 ♗xf1 28 ♖d7 ♘g5



This was the point of driving the queen to g3. If White plays 29 fxg5, then Black can exchange queens and escape.

29 ♖xg7+!

As so often with an attack against g7, the bishop on the long diagonal plays a key role.

29...♔f8

29...♔xg7 30 ♕xg5+ transposes to the game.

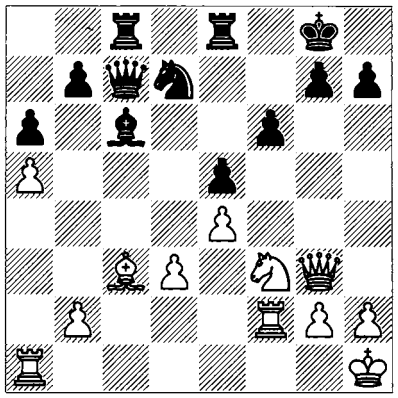
30 ♕h4

Threatening mate on h8, so Black must take.

30...♔xg7 31 ♕xg5+ ♔h7 32 ♗xf6

This wins, but White could have forced mate in four by 32 ♕f5+! ♔g8 33 ♕g6+ ♔f8 34 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 35 ♕g7#.

32...♕b7 33 ♕h5+ ♔g8 34 ♕xe8+ ♔h7 35 ♕h5+ ♔g8 36 ♕h8+ ♔f7 37 ♕g7+ 1-0



Mamedov – Shomoev
Moscow 2009

The position is currently level. White's pieces are more aggressively placed on the kingside, but he has a weak backward pawn on d3 which can easily be targeted by Black's pieces. If White plays passively, then Black will have the freedom to exploit White's pawn weaknesses, so he correctly plays to generate threats on the kingside.

24 ♘h4

This knight is heading to f5 to attack g7. White cannot expect to break down Black's defences with just the queen and knight, but he at least hopes to tie Black down. The c3-bishop is on the long diagonal, but is currently blocked out by Black's solid pawn-chain g7-f6-e5.

24...♔h8 25 ♘f5?!

Objectively speaking, 25 ♗b4 is better, to prevent Black's knight from occupying c5.

25...♘f8?

A serious misjudgement. Black intends to play his knight to g6 to shield the g7-pawn, but the knight can easily be driven away by the advance of White's h-pawn, so this plan doesn't really help Black's defence at all. 25...♘c5! is correct, taking aim at White's main weakness. After 26 h4 ♖ed8 27 ♖f3 ♗e8!, for example, White's kingside attack isn't going anywhere.

26 ♖e1?!

26 h4! is more accurate, since it isn't easy for Black to counter the advance of the h-pawn. The advance of this pawn to h6 not only steps up the pressure against g7, but also weakens the long diagonal leading to Black's king.

26...♘g6

26...♘e6 is also possible, reinforcing the defence of g7.

27 h4 ♘f4?

This error definitely tips the balance in White's favour. 27...♗d7 28 h5 ♗xf5 29 exf5 ♘f4 30 h6 ♕f7 is roughly equal.

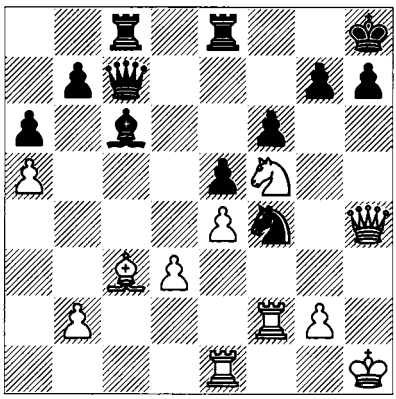
28 h5!

The start of an imaginative plan to break through on g7.

28...♘xh5

28...h6 29 ♘xh6! is also very good for White, since 29...gxh6? loses to 30 ♖xf4 exf4? 31 ♗xf6+ ♔h7 32 ♕g6#.

29 ♕h4 ♘f4?



30 ♖xf4!

This preliminary sacrifice is designed to activate the c3-bishop.

30...exf4 31 ♘xg7!

The second sacrifice completes the demolition of the pawn-chain that was restricting White's bishop, and gives him a winning attack.

31...♔xg7 32 ♕xf6+ ♔g8 33 ♕g5+?!

White can win more simply by 33 ♕h8+ (33 ♖f1 also wins) 33...♔f7 34 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 (34...♔e6 loses to 35 ♕f5+ ♔e7 36 ♗e5) 35 ♗b4+ ♖e7 36 e5, followed by e6.

33...♔f7 34 ♖f1 ♖e7 35 ♖xf4+ ♔e8 36 ♗b4

Despite his inaccuracy, White retains a winning position.

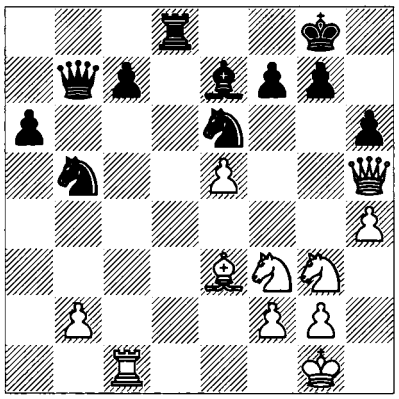
36...♖d8?!

36...♕e5 37 ♖f8+ ♔d7 38 ♖f5 ♕g7 39 ♗xe7 ♕xg5 40 ♗xg5 gives White a winning ending, but the move played is even worse.

37 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 38 ♕h5+ ♔d7 39 ♖f7 ♕xf7 40 ♕xf7+ ♔c8 41 ♕f5+ ♖d7 42 d4 1-0

41 The ♗xh6 Sacrifice

When Black's kingside has been weakened by ...h6, it's not unusual for White to be able to sacrifice a bishop on h6. Normally this is followed up by ♕xh6, securing two pawns and an attack for the bishop. As with many of these sacrifices to destroy the king's pawn-cover, the important point is whether White has other pieces ready to support the queen, since a queen by itself is generally not able to press an attack home. These extra forces may be a knight ready to jump to f5 or g5, or a rook that can switch to the g- or h-file.



Z. Almasi – V. Mikhalevski
Heviz 2008

White has an accumulation of pieces on the kingside and there is an obvious sacrificial possibility on h6. However, the soundness of this sacrifice seems doubtful since g7, the square which would be attacked by ♘f5 or ♘h5, is covered, and a knight arriving on g5 can simply be exchanged. One factor which operates in White's favour is that his rook can enter the attack by ♖c4 and ♖g4, although in some lines the rook's route to the kingside can be closed by ...♘bd4. The obvious sacrificial attempt is 25 ♗xh6 gxh6 26 ♕xh6?, but this is well met by 26...♘bd4!, both covering f5 and playing to exchange one of White's knights. The sacrifice is correct, but requires a little finesse by White.

25 ♗xh6 gxh6 26 ♘f5!

Usually ♗xh6 is followed by the immediate ♕xh6, but here it's more important to get the rook to g4 and this involves cutting out Black's ...♘bd4 defence. Playing ♘f5 achieves this, because it gains a tempo by attacking the e7-bishop and so covers d4 without loss of time.

26...♗f8 27 ♖c4

Now there is the deadly threat of 28 ♖g4+ followed by 29 ♕xf7, which Black attempts to counter by covering f7.

27...♖d7

Or 27...c5 28 ♖g4+ ♔h7 29 ♘g5+ ♘xg5 30 hxg5 and there's no defence to the threat of 31 g6+.

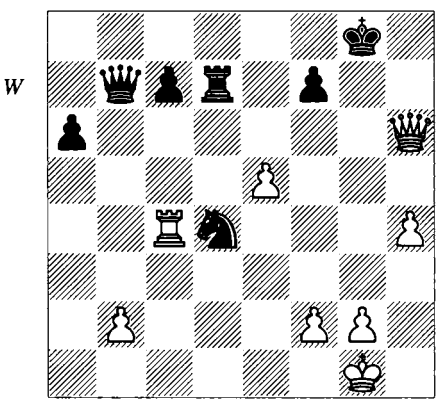
28 ♘xh6+

Now that the rook is on the fourth rank, White reverts to capturing the h-pawn to prevent the black king from hiding behind it. 28 ♖g4+ ♔h7 is far less clear due to 29 ♘g5+ ♘xg5 30 hxg5 ♕c6.

28...♗xh6 29 ♕xh6 ♘bd4

29...♖d4 fails to 30 ♘xd4 ♘bxd4 31 ♖xd4! ♘xd4 32 ♕g5+ ♔h7 (or else ♕d8+ picks up the knight) 33 ♕h5+ ♔g7 34 ♕g4+ and 35 ♕xd4, and White is two pawns ahead.

30 ♘xd4 ♘xd4



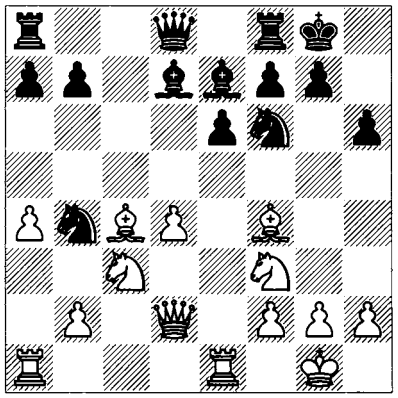
31 e6!

This neat point is the justification for White's combination. After the obvious 31...fxe6, White wins by 32 ♖xd4! ♖xd4 33 ♕xe6+ ♔h7 (other moves allow an immediate fork) 34 ♕f7+ followed by 35 ♕f6+ and 36 ♕xd4, again with two extra pawns for White.

31...♖d5 32 exf7+ ♔xf7 33 ♖xc7+! 1-0

After 33...♕xc7 34 ♕h7+ White wins the black queen.

The bishop sacrifice on h6 sometimes leads to an immediate win, but there are many cases in which its soundness is hard to judge.



Radjabov – Svidler
Morelia/Linares 2006

14 ♗xh6!

A correct decision, although in this case it's not so easy to assess the consequences of the sacrifice. Apart from the a1-rook, all the white pieces are in play, but they are not ideally posted to join in the attack on the black king. Black has a fair number of pieces around his king, but the rook on f8 prevents ...♗f8-g7, the most natural defensive manoeuvre. In this case the sacrifice doesn't lead to mate, but White can secure three pawns and an initiative for the bishop, providing more than enough compensation.

14...♖c8

Black brings his rook into play with tempo before accepting the sacrifice.

15 ♗b3 gxh6 16 ♕xh6 ♘h7

There is nothing better:

1) 16...♘d3 17 ♘g5 and there is no answer to the threats of 18 ♘ce4 and 18 ♖e3.

2) 16...♘g4 17 ♕f4 f5 18 ♖xe6 ♔g7 19 ♖e2 is similar to the game in that White has three pawns for the bishop and Black has a long-term problem with the exposed position of his king.

3) 16...♖e8 17 ♖e5! ♘g4 18 ♕h5 ♘xe5 19 ♘xe5 ♖f8 20 ♖e1! followed by ♖e3 looks slow, but actually leaves Black defenceless.

17 ♖e5 f5

Forced, or else 18 ♖h5 wins.

18 ♖xe6 ♗xe6 19 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 20 ♗xc8 ♖f6

20...♕xc8 21 ♘e5 is lost for Black.

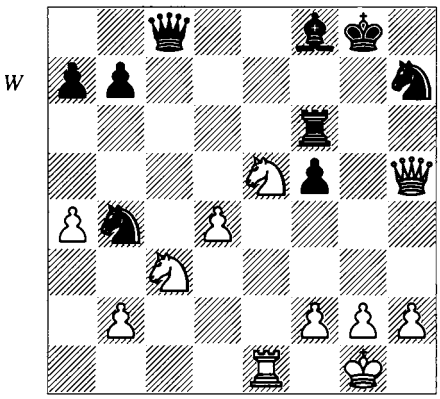
21 ♕h5 ♕xc8 22 ♖e1

In the middlegame the three pawns aren't a particular danger for Black, but the generally poor coordination of his pieces and continuing problems with his king give White a lasting initiative.

22...♗f8

22...♖e6 23 ♘e5! ♘c2 24 d5 ♘xe1 25 dxe6 ♕xe6 26 ♘g6+ ♔g7 27 ♘f4 ♕d6 28 ♕e2 ♘xg2 29 ♔xg2 leaves White a pawn up with a good position.

23 ♘e5 ♔g8



24 ♕d1?

White intends to transfer his queen to b3, but this is unnecessarily passive. 24 h4! is more flexible and gives White a large advantage: White avoids any back-rank danger, while the h-pawn might play a direct part in the attack later on. The immediate threat is 25 ♖e3 f4 26 ♘e4, with a decisive attack.

24...♘g5? 25 ♕b3+?

25 ♕c1! wins material, since it both attacks g5 and threatens 26 ♘d5!.

25...♔g7 26 h4 ♘f7 27 ♘e2 ♘xe5 28 dxe5 ♖c6?

After this slip Black is again in trouble. 28...♖h6 leaves White with just an edge.

29 ♘f4 ♗e7 30 ♕g3+ ♔h7 31 ♕f3 ♕e8 32 g3 ♕f7?

32...a5 puts up more resistance, although Black's position is very difficult in any case.

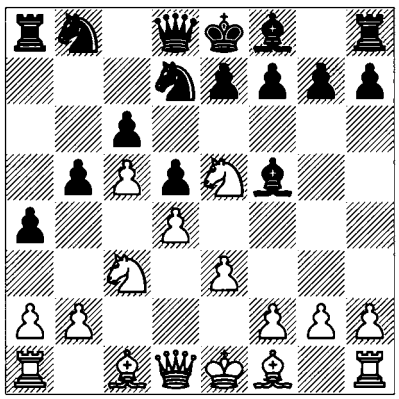
33 e6! ♕f6 34 ♕h5+ ♔g8 35 ♕e8+ ♕f8 36 ♕g6+ ♕g7 37 ♕xf5 ♖c5 38 ♕e4 ♘c6 39 ♘d5 ♕xb2 40 ♕f5 ♖c1 41 ♘xe7+ 1-0

42 The Weak f7-Square

Beginners often manage to mate their opponents on f7 by playing e4, ♗c4 and ♕h5, but accidents on f7 (or f2 with White) are not confined to beginners. The f7-pawn is a weak spot in the opening because it's only defended by the king, and a sacrifice on that square inevitably draws the king out. Even grandmasters can fall victim to such a sacrifice, especially when it is slightly out of the ordinary, as in the following example.

Kempinski – Postny
Greek Team Ch, Kallithea 2009

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 a6 5 ♘f3 ♗f5 6 ♕b3 b5 7 c5 a5 8 ♘e5 a4 9 ♕d1 ♘fd7?



10 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 11 ♕f3

Now Black must either return the piece or 'develop' his king further.

11...♔e6

11...e6 12 g4 ♕f6 13 gxf5 ♕xf5 14 ♕g3, followed by ♗h3, is also good for White, since his space advantage makes it easier for him to develop his pieces. Moreover, the slight opening of the position and the awkward placing of Black's king operates in White's favour.

The other king move, 11...♔g6?, is worse as 12 g4 ♗c2 13 ♔d2 traps the bishop.

12 g4 ♗g6 13 g5

Threatening ♗h3+, so the bishop must return.

13...♗f5 14 ♗g2

Threatening mate in two by the attractive queen sacrifice 15 ♕xd5+!. The d7-knight has no moves, so now Black has to return the piece in any case.

14...♘xc5 15 dxc5

White's combination has left material equal, but Black's king is very uncomfortable on e6.

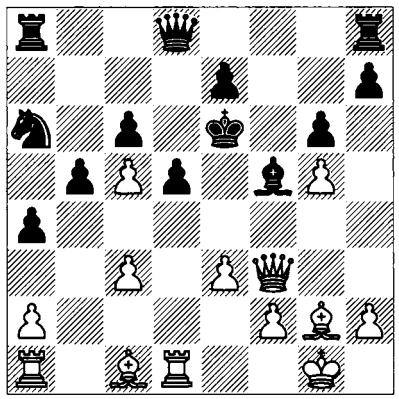
15...g6 16 0-0 ♗g7 17 ♖d1

Threatening 18 ♘xd5 cxd5 19 ♖xd5, or simply 18 e4.

17...♗xc3

Necessary to fend off the immediate threats, but this leaves Black's dark squares very weak.

18 bxc3 ♘a6



19 c4!

White pursues the attack with great vigour; by sacrificing two pawns, he opens lines to enable his forces to reach the enemy king. The immediate 19 e4?! is inferior as Black can reply 19...dxe4.

19...bxc4 20 e4! ♗xe4

Now, however, 20...dxe4 loses to 21 ♕e2 followed by ♕xc4+.

21 ♗h3+ ♗f5 22 ♗xf5+ gxf5 23 ♖e1+ ♔d7 24 ♕xf5+ ♔e8

24...♔c7 25 ♖b1 followed by ♗f4+ wins.

25 g6

Black's king is back on its original square, but White's attack continues with renewed vigour.

25...hxg6

25...♖f8 loses to 26 ♕e6 hxg6 27 ♗g5.

26 ♕xg6+ ♔d7 27 ♕e6+ ♔e8 28 ♕xc6+ ♔f7 29 ♕e6+ ♔e8 30 ♗g5 ♘xc5 31 ♕c6+ 1-0

After 31...♘d7 32 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 33 ♕xa8+ Black suffers massive material loss.

The weakness of the f7-square (or f2-square as White) is alleviated by castling kingside, because then the rook, as well as the king, defends the crucial square. However, if the rook later moves away, the weakness can reappear.

Maiorov – Borovikov
Neustadt an der Weinstrasse 2009

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 ♕c2 ♗d6 7 b3 0-0 8 ♗e2 b6 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♗b2 ♕e7 11 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 12 ♕b1?! a6 13 ♖fd1 ♖fd8 14 ♗f1?!

White has played the opening very passively and now Black is able to take the initiative in the centre.

14...c5 15 cxd5 exd5 16 g3 c4! 17 a4 cxb3 18 ♘d2 h5 19 ♘xb3 h4 20 ♕d3 hxg3 21 hxg3 ♘g4 22 ♕f5 ♘h6?!

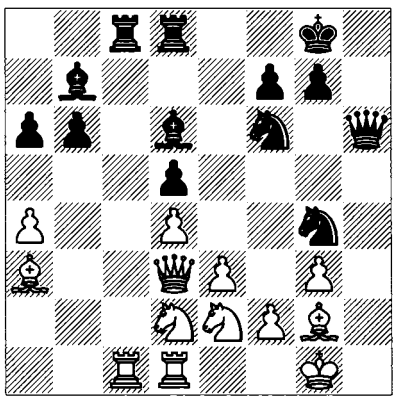
22...♘df6 is more aggressive.

23 ♕d3?

White should prefer 23 ♕f3, using the queen to defend the vulnerable kingside.

23...♕g5 24 ♗g2 ♘f6 25 ♘d2 ♘hg4 26 ♘e2 ♕h6 27 ♗a3

B



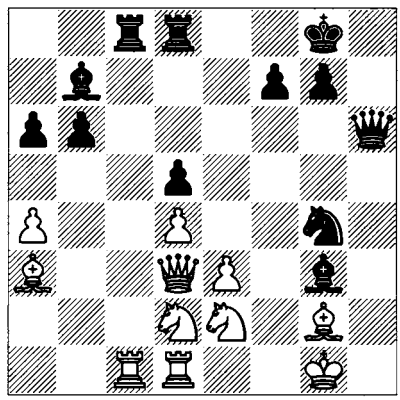
Black has a strong attack since the disappearance of the h-pawns has allowed his queen access to h2. However, White has a fair number of defensive pieces on the kingside, so at the moment the check on h2 cannot be followed up decisively. The key to the attack is to sacrifice on the weakened f2-square. This leads to the demolition of White's kingside pawn-structure and, if followed up correctly, to a large advantage for Black. Here the sacrifice is not intended to draw the white king into the open, but to break up White's pawns and to give Black time to move his remaining attacking forces into position.

27...♘xf2! 28 ♔xf2 ♘g4+ 29 ♔g1?

After this, White is destroyed by a second hammer blow on the kingside. It is better to try fleeing with the king by 29 ♔e1, although Black retains a clear advantage after 29...♘xe3 30 ♔f2 ♘g4+ 31 ♔e1 ♗xa3 32 ♕xa3 ♘e3 33 ♗f3 ♘xd1 34 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 35 ♔xd1 ♖e8 (threatening to penetrate to e3) 36 a5 b5 37 ♘f4 ♕g5 thanks to his material advantage and possibilities to penetrate with his major pieces.

29...♗xg3!

W



Without this, Black's sacrifice would not yield very much, but the removal of the last pawn in front of the white king leaves it fatally exposed.

30 ♘xg3

30 ♘f3 ♗f2+ 31 ♔f1 ♗xe3 32 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 33 ♕c3 ♖e8 gives Black three pawns and a massive attack for the piece.

30...♕h2+

Black has delayed giving this check until it is most effective.

31 ♔f1 ♕xg3

Now f2 and e3 are both under attack and White has no defence.

32 ♕e2 ♘xe3+ 33 ♔g1 ♘xd1 34 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 35 ♘f3

After 35 ♕xd1 ♕e3+ 36 ♔h1 ♖c6 the rook enters the attack with deadly effect, but the move played leaves White hopelessly behind on material.

35...♘c3 36 ♕e7 ♕c7 0-1

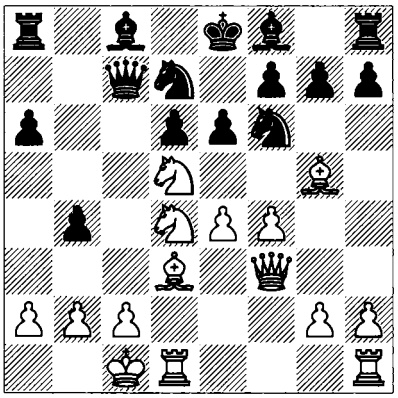
43 The ♘d5 Sacrifice in the Sicilian

E. Berg – Li Chao
China-Sweden match, Beijing 2006

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♕c7 8 ♕f3 b5 9 ♗d3 ♘bd7 10 0-0-0 b4?!

Practically forcing White to make a correct sacrifice on d5. 10...♗b7 is safer.

11 ♘d5



A typical Sicilian ♘d5 sacrifice. In return for the piece, White obtains one pawn and traps Black's king in the centre. It's important to realize that White does not need to obtain strong threats immediately, as Black cannot quickly solve the problem of his exposed king.

11...exd5 12 ♖he1!

This is more accurate than 12 exd5?, which allows 12...♗e7! 13 ♖he1 ♔f8 14 ♘f5 ♗d8 15 ♘xg7 h6!, when White's attack has failed to break through.

12...♗b7

Now 12...♗e7 is met by 13 ♘f5! ♔f8 14 ♘xe7 ♔xe7 15 e5 dxe5 16 fxe5 ♘xe5 17 ♕g3, regaining the piece with an enormous attack.

13 exd5+ ♔d8 14 ♘c6+

The ♘d5 sacrifice typically results in the possibility of a knight jump to c6. In some cases it's better to keep this idea in reserve, but here White gains time since dxc6 will attack the d7-knight.

14...♗xc6 15 dxc6 ♘b6

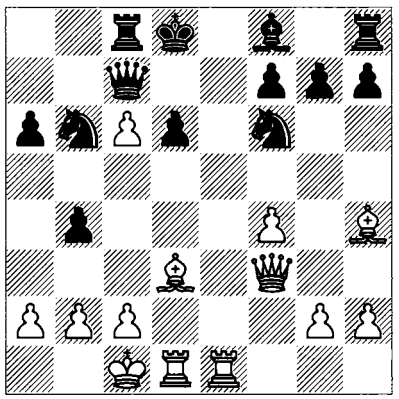
15...♘c5 16 ♗xf6+ gxf6 17 ♗c4 followed by ♕h5 also gives White a very dangerous attack.

16 ♗h4!?

White is content to play slowly; this move introduces ideas such as g4-g5 or ♗f2. The more direct 16 ♗xf6+ gxf6 17 ♕h5 is also dangerous, but as a defender it's always unpleasant to be faced with multiple attacking possibilities.

16...♖c8

There is nothing better. After 16...a5 17 ♗b5 ♗e7 18 g4 Black is gradually pushed back, while 16...♗e7 is met by 17 g4 d5 18 ♗f2 ♗d6 19 g5 ♗xf4+ 20 ♔b1 ♗xg5 21 ♕g2! h6 22 h4 ♕xc6 23 hxg5 hxg5 24 ♕xg5, when White has a tremendous attack in return for the pawns.



17 ♗xa6?!

17 ♗xf6+ gxf6 18 ♗e4 f5 19 ♗xf5 ♕xc6 20 ♕h5 is practically winning for White since the obvious 20...♖c7 loses to 21 ♕g5+ ♗e7 22 ♖xe7! ♖xe7 23 ♕f6.

17...♖a8?

Allowing the bishop to occupy b7 is fatal. 17...♕xc6 is the best chance; by 18 ♕e2! d5 19 ♗xf6+ gxf6 20 ♗xc8 ♔xc8 21 ♕a6+ White retains a clear advantage, but Black still has defensive chances.

18 ♗b7 ♖xa2 19 ♔b1 ♖a5 20 ♖e5! ♘a4

20...♘c4 21 ♗xf6+ gxf6 22 ♖e4 ♖c5 23 ♕e2 and 20...♖a7 21 ♕e3 also win for White.

21 ♕e4 ♖xe5 22 fxe5 ♕b6

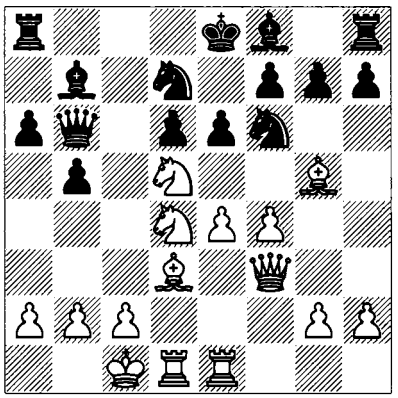
Threatening to win by 23...♘c3+, but this trap is easily thwarted.

23 ♖d4! ♘c5 24 ♕d5 b3 25 exd6 bxc2+ 26 ♔xc2 ♘xb7 27 ♗xf6+! 1-0

After 27...gxf6 28 c7+ ♔d7 29 ♕f5+ White mates quickly.

Maslak – Grandelius
Olomouc 2009

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♘bd7 8 ♕f3 ♕c7 9 0-0-0 b5 10 ♗d3 ♗b7 11 ♖he1 ♕b6 12 ♘d5!?



This sacrifice has been played many times since it was introduced by Maia Chiburdanidze against Dvoirys in 1980. Attention has mostly focused on 12...♕xd4, but this game shows that taking the d5-knight is not out of the question.

12...exd5 13 ♘c6! dxe4!

This is Black's only viable continuation (in the prototype game, Black played 13...♗xc6? and lost convincingly). White retains a dangerous initiative, but it's not easy to push the attack home.

14 ♗xe4 ♘c5 15 ♗xf6 gxf6 16 ♕h3!

One month earlier, the game Blomqvist-Grandelius, Swedish Ch, Kungsör 2009 had continued 16 ♗f5+?! ♘e6 17 ♕h5 ♗xc6 18 ♗xe6 ♖a7! 19 ♗d7++?! ♔xd7 20 ♕f5+ ♔c7 21 ♕xf6 ♕f2 22 ♕xh8 ♕xf4+ 23 ♔b1 ♕h6 and Black consolidated his material advantage and went on to win. Another idea is 16 ♗d5+ ♔d7 17 ♕h5 ♔c7 18 ♕xf7+ ♘d7 19 ♖d3 ♗xc6 20 ♗xc6 ♕xc6 21 ♖c3 ♕xc3 22 bxc3, but this is also not very clear.

This example shows that White too must play accurately since if he chooses the wrong plan, his attack may well run out of steam. However, in general the defender has a tougher task than the attacker, a comment which applies to many marginal sacrifices. One mistake by the defence and it may be all over, whereas a mistake by the attacker usually just shifts the balance and leaves the main battle still to be fought.

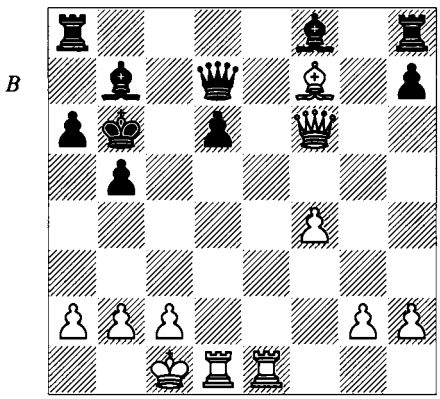
16...♘e6

The only move.

17 ♗g6! ♔d7 18 ♗xf7 ♔xc6 19 ♕xe6 ♕d8

A more or less forced sequence has led to a messy situation in which White retains a menacing attack, but there is nothing clear.

20 ♕e3 ♕d7 21 ♕c3+ ♔b6 22 ♕xf6



The h8-rook is trapped, so now Black must surrender some material.

22...♗xg2?

As so often happens, the continual pressure on the defender eventually results in a mistake. 22...h5! 23 ♗e6 ♗g7 24 ♗xd7 ♗xf6 25 ♖xd6+ ♔c7 26 ♖xf6 ♔xd7 27 ♖f7+ ♔c6 28 ♖ee7 gives White three pawns and an initiative for the piece, but with only one passed pawn it is doubtful if he has real winning chances.

23 ♖g1! ♗c6 24 ♗e6?

Missing a clear win by 24 ♖de1! (threatening 25 ♗e6 followed by ♕xh8) 24...d5 (24...♕c7 25 ♗b3 is even worse) 25 ♗e6 ♕c7 26 ♕xh8 ♕xf4+ 27 ♔b1 and White is a clear exchange ahead.

24...♕e7 25 ♕d4+ ♔c7 26 ♖de1 ♗h6 27 ♗d5?

27 ♗g8! ♕h4 28 ♕xh8 ♗xf4+ 29 ♔b1 ♗xh2 30 ♖gf1 gives White a solid material advantage.

27...♕d7 28 ♗xc6 ♔xc6 29 ♕f6 ♗xf4+ 30 ♕xf4 ♖ae8

The upshot is that material is equal, but White retains some positional advantage due to Black's weak d-pawn and his more exposed king. White did eventually win (1-0, 63) after a long struggle.

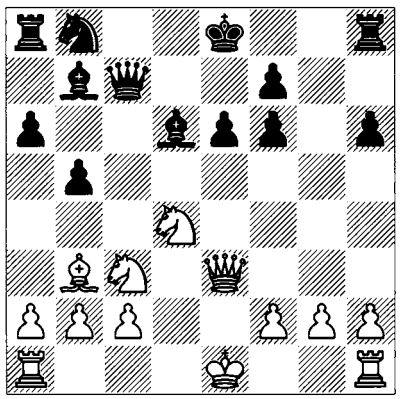
44 The ♗xe6 Sacrifice in the Sicilian

Stellwagen – Naiditsch
Wijk aan Zee 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗b3 b5 8 ♗g5 ♗e7 9 ♕f3 ♕c7 10 e5 ♗b7 11 exd6 ♗xd6 12 ♕e3 h6?

This move provokes White into making a dangerous sacrifice on e6. 12...♗c5 is correct, pinning the knight and thereby preventing the ♗xe6 sacrifice. In this case the position would be roughly level.

13 ♗xf6 gxf6



14 ♗xe6!

The simple 14 ♘d5 ♗xd5 15 ♗xd5 ♖a7 16 ♗f3 gives White a slight positional advantage, but the piece sacrifice is far more energetic.

14...fxe6 15 ♘xe6

A typical result of the ♗xe6 piece sacrifice is a knight established on e6, preventing Black from castling either side. If the sacrifice nets two pawns for the piece and the knight can be maintained on e6, then the compensation is almost always sufficient. In this case, with White's rooks ready to occupy the central files more or less straight away, the compensation is far more than sufficient.

15...♕e7 16 0-0-0

Black's only real hope is to remove the e6-knight by occupying e5 with a piece. In the game he uses the bishop, while if he tries to bring his knight to e5 by 16...♘d7 17 ♖he1 ♘e5 White wins with 18 ♘e4! ♗xe4 19 ♕xe4 ♖c8 20 ♕d5 ♔d7 21 ♘g7! followed by ♘f5.

16...♔f7 17 ♖he1 ♗e5 18 f4

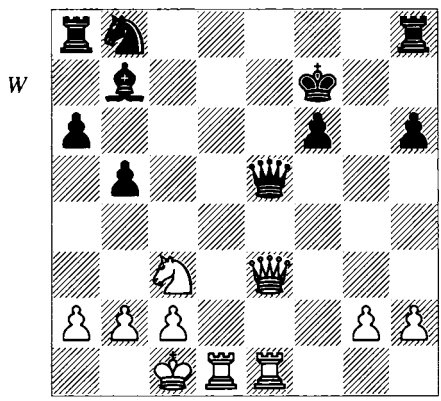
Good enough, but 18 ♘d4 (threatening 19 f4) 18...♕c7 19 ♕h3 is even better, as Black cannot prevent the queen from penetrating at e6 or h5.

18...♕xe6 19 fxe5

The dominant e6-knight has gone, but White's control of the central files and threats against Black's king give him a decisive advantage.

19...♕xe5

19...fxe5 20 ♖f1+ ♔e8 21 ♕c5! (threatening ♕c7 or ♖d6) 21...♘d7 22 ♕c7 ♕c6 23 ♖xd7 ♕xc7 (23...♕xd7 24 ♕xe5+) 24 ♖xc7 ♗xg2 25 ♖e1 will give White an extra pawn and a large positional advantage thanks to his active rooks.



20 ♕b6! ♕f4+ 21 ♔b1 ♗c6 22 g3 ♕f5

Or 22...♕c4 23 ♕c7+ ♗d7 24 ♕b7 ♕c6 25 ♖xd7+ ♕xd7 26 ♕xa8 and White wins.

23 ♕c7+ ♗d7

23...♔g6 loses to 24 ♘e2! h5 25 ♘f4+ ♔h6 26 ♖d6.

24 g4

The immediate 24 ♕b7 is also very good.

24...♕f3

After 24...♕xg4 25 ♕b7 White picks up the a8-rook.

25 ♘d5 ♖c8 26 ♕d6

Black has no chance with all the white pieces converging on his defenceless king.

26...♗xg4 27 ♖e7+ ♔g6

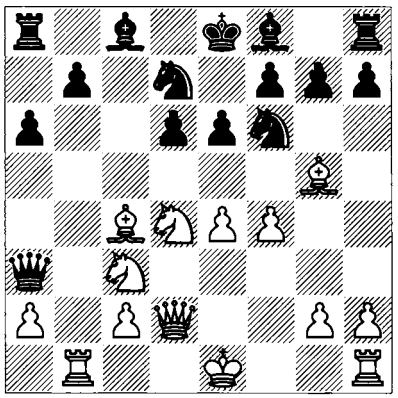
27...♔f8 28 ♖c7+ ♔g8 29 ♘xf6+ and White mates quickly.

28 ♘f4+ ♕xf4 29 ♕xf4 ♗xd1 30 ♕e4+ 1-0

30...f5 31 ♖e6+ mates in a few more moves.

Radjabov – Gelfand
European Team Ch, Gothenburg 2005

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗g5 e6 7 f4 ♘bd7 8 ♗c4 ♕b6 9 ♕d2 ♕xb2 10 ♖b1 ♕a3



In this version of the Poisoned Pawn (with the additional moves ♗c4 and ...♘bd7) White's problem is that the natural 11 0-0? loses a piece after 11...♕c5. The only way to justify his play is to sacrifice the bishop on e6, but this is not very clear.

11 ♗xe6 fxe6 12 ♘xe6 ♔f7

The simplest way to meet the threat of ♘c7+.

13 f5

This ♗xe6 sacrifice is far less clear than in the previous example. At the moment White has only one pawn for the piece and there aren't any open files leading to Black's king. Nevertheless, the dominant knight on e6 gives White almost sufficient play for the piece and it would be easy for Black to panic and allow White's initiative to overwhelm him. Gelfand's careful defence is a model for how to handle such positions. He takes care not to allow White any tactical opportunities and gradually gets his pieces out, even if he has to surrender a pawn in the process.

13...♕a5

A cautious and flexible move, withdrawing the queen from its vulnerable position on a3 while at the same time covering c7 and d8. Crude attempts to remove the e6-knight don't work; for example, 13...♘c5?! 14 0-0 ♘xe6? 15 fxe6+ ♗xe6 16 ♖xb7+ ♗e7 17 ♘d5 gives White a winning attack.

14 0-0 b5

Preparing to develop the bishop to b7.

15 a4 ♗b7!

Black is willing to surrender a pawn to bring his queenside forces into play.

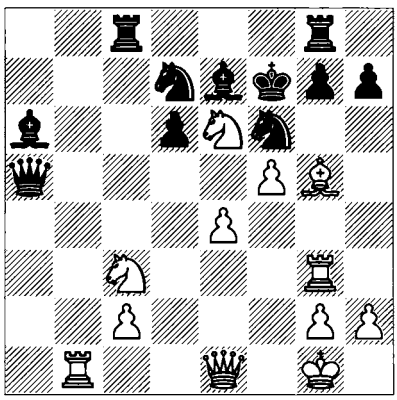
16 axb5 ♖c8 17 bxa6 ♗xa6 18 ♖f3 ♗e7

Black slowly but steadily activates his pieces.

19 ♖g3 ♖hg8

Black had more than one satisfactory option, since 19...♖xc3 20 ♕xc3 ♕xc3 21 ♖xc3 ♘xe4 22 ♖c6 ♘xg5 23 ♘xg5+ ♗xg5 24 ♖xa6 ♗e7 is also slightly better for Black.

20 ♕e1



20...♗c4!

A strong move, intending to eliminate the e6-knight even if this draws Black's king into the centre of the board.

21 ♖a1

21 ♗d2 ♗xe6 22 fxe6+ ♔xe6 23 ♘b5 ♕b6+ 24 ♗e3 ♕a6 25 ♗f2 ♖c4 also favours Black.

21...♕b6+ 22 ♗e3 ♕c6

White is now struggling to find compensation for the piece. Black has developed all his pieces and stands ready to eliminate White's proud knight.

23 ♘d4 ♕c7 24 ♘f3

White's main asset has retreated and Black can consolidate his extra material.

24...♖ge8 25 ♖a7 ♕b8 26 ♗d4 ♗f8 27 ♕c1 ♖c7 28 ♖a5 ♔g8

The culmination of Black's defensive play. His king at last reaches safety and he is now ready to take over the initiative.

29 ♕g5 ♘xe4 30 ♘xe4 ♕b1+ 31 ♔f2 ♕f1+ 0-1

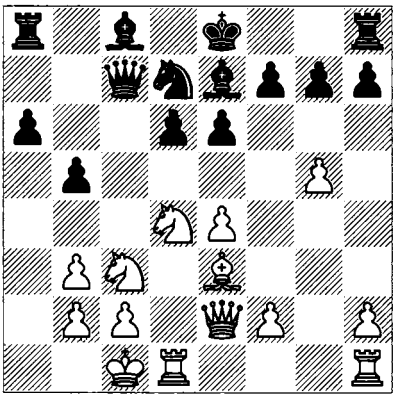
45 The ♘f5 Sacrifice in the Sicilian

The ♘f5 sacrifice occurs almost exclusively in the Sicilian. In return for the piece, White usually gains a pawn, some time and an open file. Compared to other Sicilian piece sacrifices, the compensation White obtains from a ♘f5 sacrifice is often of a longer-term nature.

Azarov – Jobava
European Clubs Cup, Kemer 2007

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗e3 ♗e7 8 ♕e2 a6 9 0-0-0 ♕c7 10 ♗b3 ♘a5 11 g4 b5 12 g5 ♘xb3+ 13 axb3 ♘d7

W



14 ♘f5!?

This idea has been known since the 1960s. Although theory insists that it should not give White any advantage, in the hands of an attacking player it remains a dangerous weapon, as this game demonstrates.

14...exf5 15 ♘d5 ♕d8 16 exf5 ♗b7

Black must eliminate the all-powerful d5-knight as quickly as possible. 16...0-0? is wrong due to 17 f6 gxf6 18 gxf6 ♗xf6 19 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 20 f4 with a crushing ♗d4 to come.

17 f6 gxf6 18 ♖he1 ♗xd5 19 ♖xd5

At first sight White can hardly have enough for the piece, especially as he doesn't have a single pawn in return. However, in practice he has scored slightly more than 50% from this position, and even theory believes that at any rate White should not be worse.

19...♖g8

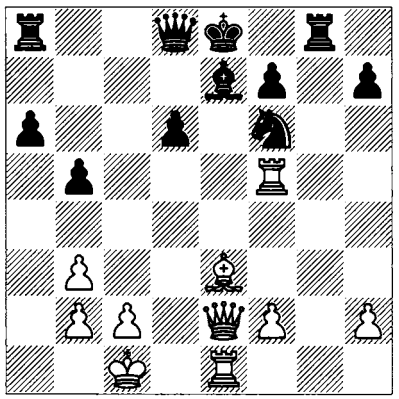
A key point is that 19...0-0? loses to 20 gxf6 ♗xf6 (20...♘xf6 21 ♖g5+ ♔h8 22 ♗d4 is lethal) 21 ♖g1+ ♔h8 22 ♖h5 followed by ♖xh7+. Since Black's king must stay in the centre in any case, he at least tries to activate his king's rook.

20 gxf6

Other lines, such as 20 ♗f4 ♔f8 21 ♕h5, also lead to approximate equality.

20...♘xf6 21 ♖f5

B



White threatens to win by 22 ♗b6, so Black has to take care.

21...♖g6?

Already a serious mistake. 21...♘g4 and 21...♖b8 are better defences.

22 ♗b6! ♕d7 23 ♕f3

The double attack on a8 and f6 regains the sacrificed material, after which Black has problems due to his more exposed king.

23...♖c8?

After 23...♖b8 24 ♖xf6 ♖xb6 25 ♕a8+ ♕d8 26 ♖xe7+ ♔xe7 27 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 28 ♕xd8 White has a definite advantage, as Black will have to give up his d-pawn to unite his rooks, but nevertheless this was his best chance.

24 ♖xf6

Now Black is lost since he has nothing to compensate for White's attack.

24...d5 25 ♖xg6 hxg6 26 ♕f6 ♕b7 27 b4

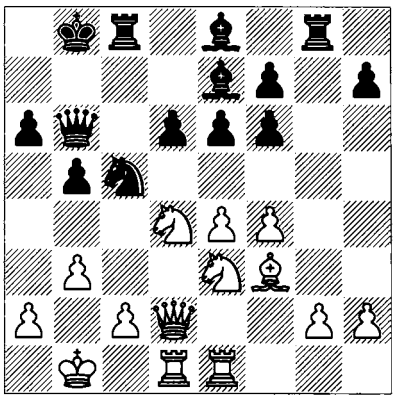
With the deadly threat of ♗c5.

27...♖c4 28 f3 1-0

Preventing ...♖e4 (due to ♕h8+ and then fxe4), and leaving Black with no defence to ♗c5.

The piece sacrifice on f5 usually occurs when the enemy king is in the centre, but this is not exclusively the case. It's important to be flexible and to remain aware that standard types of sacrifice can occur even in non-standard situations.

W



Volokitin – Nevednichy
Slovenian Team Ch, Murska Sobota 2006

In this typical Sicilian position, Black's king looks slightly exposed, but his solid central pawn-structure appears adequate to keep White's forces at bay. However, there are certain factors that favour White, in particular the f3-bishop aimed at Black's queenside and the centralized white rooks which would be well-placed if the centre were to open up. By sacrificing a piece, White is able to exploit both the slight shakiness in Black's defences and the latent advantages of his own position.

21 ♘df5!

This surprising sacrifice activates White's forces and leads to a dangerous attack.

21...exf5

e7 and d6 are both under threat, so Black must accept.

22 ♘d5 ♕a7 23 exf5

Just as in the previous example, the dominant d5-knight and pressure along the e-file form important components of White's compensation.

23...♗d8

Black's moves were forced up to this point, but now how does White continue the attack?

24 ♘xf6!

This is the key idea: White secures a third pawn for the piece, and at the same time opens up the d-file for his other rook.

24...♗xf6 25 ♕xd6+ ♕c7 26 ♕xf6

If Black doesn't take rapid action, he will surely lose as the f3-bishop and possibilities of ♖e7 and ♖d6 will prove decisive if White is given a tempo to pursue his attack.

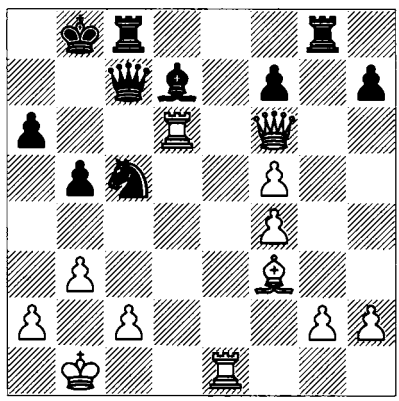
26...♗d7?

Too slow. The only move is 26...♘d7, attacking the queen and the c2-pawn. Then 27 ♕d6 (after 27 ♕b2 ♘c5 White has nothing better than to return to f6 since he cannot hope to press home the attack with his queen passively placed on b2) 27...♘c5 28 ♕xc7+ ♖xc7 29 ♖d8+ ♖c8 30 ♖d6 leaves White with a clear endgame advantage based on his three healthy pawns and strong initiative for the piece, but at least Black could play on.

27 ♖d6?

Surprisingly overlooking a clear win by 27 ♖e7!, since Black cannot both defend his pawns on the seventh rank and cope with the threats on the queenside; for example, 27...♖gf8 loses to 28 ♕d4 ♖cd8 29 ♕d5. After the f- and h-pawns fall, White will have a massive five pawns for the piece.

B



27...♘b7?

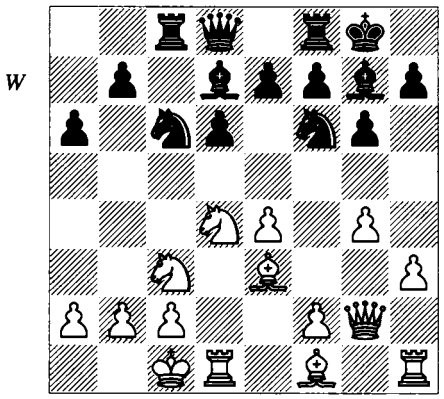
Suicide. The only move is 27...♗e6!, when White has nothing better than 28 ♖ed1 ♘b7 29 ♖c6 ♕xf4 30 ♖b6 ♖c7 31 ♖xb7+ ♖xb7 32 ♗xb7 ♔xb7 33 ♕e7+ ♕c7 34 ♕xc7+ ♔xc7 35 fxe6 fxe6 36 g3, reaching a rook ending with an extra pawn. Perhaps this should be a win, but it doesn't look straightforward and Black at least has a fighting chance of saving the game.

28 ♖xd7 1-0

28...♕xd7 29 ♖e7 is catastrophic.

46 ...♖xc3 in the Sicilian

Many sacrifices can be played with either colour, but the ...♖xc3 exchange sacrifice is overwhelmingly played by Black in the Sicilian. In some cases the aim is purely positional, but in this section we shall examine the situation in which White's king is castled queenside and the sacrifice leads to a direct attack on his king.



Abergel – Negi
Cappelle la Grande 2010

This position features a Sicilian Dragon structure in which White has rather eccentrically posted his queen on g2. The offside position of the queen greatly strengthens a possible exchange sacrifice on c3, and this is already a danger.

12 ♗e2?

White ignores the threat and at once falls into a critical position. Although in truth there were no really tempting moves, White could at least have tried 12 ♘b3 to avoid the type of catastrophe which occurs in the game.

12...♘xd4 13 ♗xd4

13 ♖xd4 ♕a5 is very awkward for White.

13...e5!

This is the point. By driving the bishop away from d4, Black sets up the exchange sacrifice on c3. Even though the Dragon bishop is now blocked by the e5-pawn, Black still obtains excellent play for his sacrifice.

14 ♗e3 ♖xc3 15 bxc3 ♕a5

It's already clear that White is in deep trouble. The c3- and a2-pawns are under attack, and after 16 ♔b2 ♖c8 17 ♗d2 ♗e6 18 c4 ♕b6+ 19 ♔c1 (19 ♔a1 ♗xc4 20 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 is also catastrophic) 19...♕c6 20 ♕f3 (or else ...♗xc4 wins) 20...♘xe4 White's position is a total wreck.

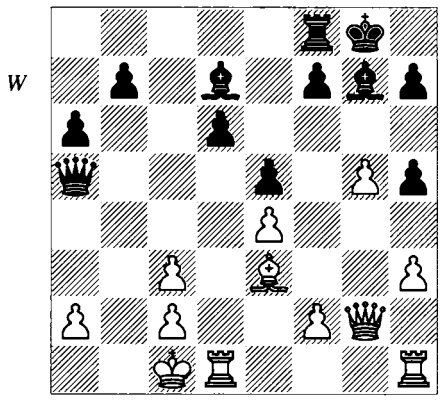
16 g5

This drives the knight away from f6 so that at least it will be unable to capture on e4 later, as in the previous variation.

16...♘h5

White is more or less forced to take this knight since otherwise it can jump into f4, but that removes one of the few pieces White can use to shore up the queenside.

17 ♗xh5 gxh5



18 ♕f1

A rather desperate attempt to bring the queen back into the battle. 18 ♔b2 ♖c8 19 ♗d2 ♗e6 20 ♖a1 defends everything temporarily, but after 20...d5 21 a4 b5 22 ♔c1 bxa4 White is not going to survive long.

18...♖c8 19 c4 ♗e6 20 ♕d3

20 c5 dxc5 21 ♕d3 c4 22 ♕d6 c3 is also hopeless for White.

20...♗xc4 21 ♕xd6

There isn't anywhere else for the queen to go, but now the dark-squared bishop can re-enter the game via f8.

21...♕xa2 22 ♕d7 ♕a3+ 23 ♔d2 ♕a5+ 24 ♔c1 ♗e6 25 ♕xb7 ♗f8

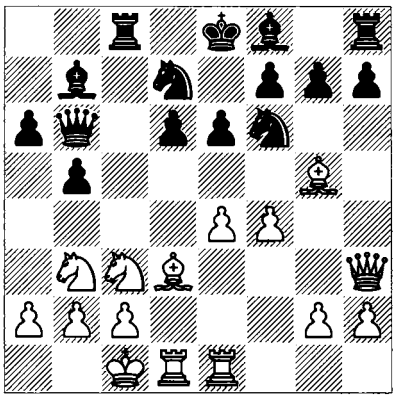
With all Black's pieces aimed at the king, White has no chance.

26 ♖he1 ♗b4 0-1

There's no answer to the threat of mate on a1.

White's best chance against the ...♖xc3 sacrifice is often to develop active play himself, since the long-term chances usually favour Black.

B



Shirov – Anand
Morelia/Linares 2008

13...♖xc3!?

This is a marginal case and, objectively speaking, the sacrifice may not be totally correct in this position. However, it does present White with awkward problems to solve and it's never easy to be thrown on the defensive as White so early in the game.

14 bxc3 ♕c7 15 ♔b1 ♗e7

Development is the first priority. Grabbing a pawn by 15...♕xc3? is a serious mistake because White wins after 16 e5 dxe5 (no better is 16...♘d5 17 f5) 17 ♗xf6 gxf6 18 ♗xb5!.

16 e5!

Shirov recognizes the danger that if Black is allowed to complete his development by ...e5, ...0-0 and ...♖c8 then White will lack active play while Black will have a growing initiative on the queenside. Therefore he decides to play actively himself.

16...dxe5 17 f5?

Missing the best line 17 fxe5! ♘d5 18 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 (18...♘xc3+ 19 ♔a1 ♘xd1 20 ♗b4 traps the black king in the centre of the board) 19 ♖d2 ♘xe5 20 ♕g3 ♘xd3 21 ♕xc7+ ♘xc7 22 cxd3, when White has some advantage in the ending, although it would certainly be tough to win.

17...♘d5

Both sides have attacking chances against the enemy king and a tense and roughly balanced struggle ensues.

18 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 19 fxe6 fxe6?!

This automatic capture is wrong. 19...♘xc3+! 20 ♔c1 (20 ♔a1 loses to 20...♘xd1!, threatening mate by ...♕c3+) 20...♘f6 21 ♖d2 e4! enables Black to take over the initiative.

20 ♕g3 g6

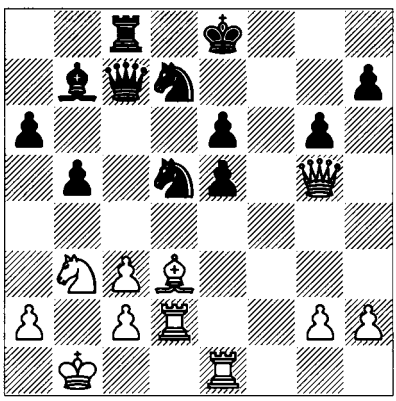
Now 20...♘xc3+ may be met by 21 ♔a1 as g7 is hanging with check.

21 ♖d2 ♖c8 22 ♕g5+

There are many lines leading to perpetual check, such as 22 ♕h4+ ♘7f6 23 ♖f2 e4 24 ♗xe4 ♘xc3+ 25 ♔c1 ♕e5! 26 ♖xf6! ♘xa2+ 27 ♔b1 ♘c3+ 28 ♔c1.

22...♔e8

W



23 ♕g4?

Attacking e6, but Black can defend this with gain of tempo. Either 23 ♕h6 or 23 ♕h4 holds the balance.

23...♘xc3+ 24 ♔a1 ♗d5

This unexpectedly consolidates Black's position, leaving White facing the threat of ...♕d6 followed by ...♕a3.

25 ♖e3

25 ♕b4 a5 26 ♕xa5? ♖a8! is a neat line.

25...♘f6 26 ♕h4 ♕e7

26...♕g7! is even stronger, to set up threats on the long diagonal after ...e4.

27 ♗f1?

This loses at once, but even 27 ♕g3 e4 28 ♗e2 b4 holds no real hope of saving the game as White's pieces are totally without activity.

27...♗xb3 28 cxb3 ♘ce4! 29 ♖b2

29 ♖xe4 ♕a3 30 ♗d3 ♘xe4 31 ♕xe4 ♕c1+ is winning for Black.

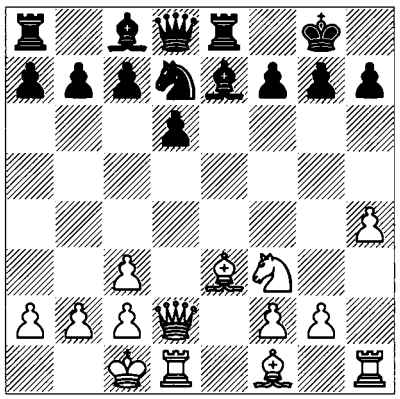
29...♖c1+ 30 ♖b1 ♕c5 0-1

47 Castling on Opposite Sides

When the kings are on opposite sides, attacks are often conducted using pawn advances, a strategy that would normally be too risky if the kings were on the same side.

Ivanchuk – Gelfand
Amber Rapid, Nice 2010

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘xe4 5 ♘c3 ♘xc3 6 dxc3 ♗e7 7 ♗e3 0-0 8 ♕d2 ♘d7 9 0-0-0 ♖e8 10 h4



10...c6 11 ♔b1 ♕a5?!

This looks doubtful given that White has already played ♔b1 voluntarily. It seems more logical to play 11...♘f6 to release the c8-bishop.

12 h5 h6

Black prevents the advance of the white pawn to h6, which would create a permanent mating danger.

13 ♗d3 ♗f8 14 g4!

White throws a second pawn forward. A typical feature of opposite-side castling attacks is that the attacker can easily place his rooks behind the advancing pawns. Here the h1-rook is already in position, and the other rook can slide to g1 at a moment's notice.

14...♘f6?!

14...♘b6 is a better defence, although 15 ♘d4 ♘d5 16 c4 ♕xd2 17 ♗xd2 ♘f6 18 f3 gives White a slight advantage.

15 g5 ♗e6

At first sight this is awkward for White, because he does not want to allow the exchange of queens by playing 16 c4, while 16 b3? is obviously bad due to 16...♘d5.

16 a3!

The apparent problem with this move is the possibility of ...♕d5, attacking f3 and threatening mate in two, but White has calculated accurately.

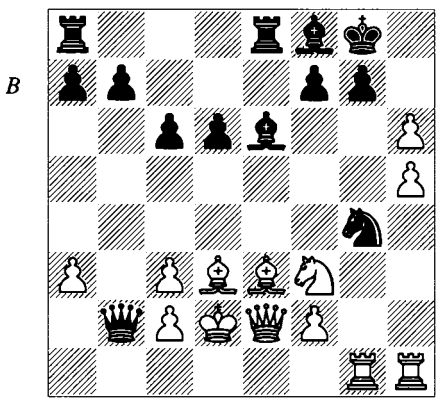
16...♘g4

The best chance, as the immediate 16...♕d5 17 c4 ♕xf3 18 gxf6 ♕xf6 19 ♗d4 ♕f3 20 ♖dg1 gives White an enormous attack for the pawn.

17 gxh6 ♕d5 18 ♕e2!

White simultaneously stops the mate and defends the attacked knight. It turns out that the penetration by Black's queen to a2 and a1 doesn't achieve very much.

18...♕a2+ 19 ♔c1 ♕a1+ 20 ♔d2 ♕xb2 21 ♖dg1



With the deadly threat of 22 ♘d4 (or 22 ♘h4). White's pawn-based attack has proved more effective than Black's piece attack.

21...♗d7

21...c5 stops ♘d4, but then White wins by 22 ♘g5! ♘xh6 23 ♘xe6 ♖xe6 24 ♖b1 ♕xa3 25 ♖a1 and 26 ♖hb1 trapping the queen.

22 ♖xg4! ♗xg4 23 ♘g5

Threatening mate by 24 h7+ ♔h8 25 ♘xf7#.

23...♗e6 24 ♗d4 ♕a2 25 ♖g1

Black has no chance with White's whole army in the attack.

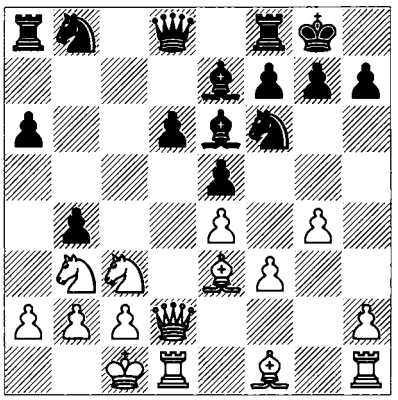
25...c5 26 ♗h7+ ♔h8 27 hxg7+ ♗xg7 28 ♘xf7+ ♗xf7 29 ♗xg7+ ♔xh7 30 ♕d3+ ♔g8 31 ♗f6+ ♔f8 32 ♕xd6+ 1-0

Sax – Gallagher
Mitropa Cup, Baden 1999

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e6 8 ♗e3 ♗e7 9 ♕d2 0-0 10 0-0-0 b5

10...♘bd7 is the most popular move today.

11 g4 b4



In this game both sides are attacking with pawns, a common situation in opposite-side castling. The result of the game depends not only on whose pawns arrive first, but also on which side is best able to exploit the holes which the advancing pawns tear in the enemy castled position.

12 ♘d5 ♗xd5 13 exd5 a5 14 ♔b1 ♕c7

Black doesn't rush forward with ...a4, but takes time out to develop some pieces. The immediate 14...a4 is less flexible, because after 15 ♘c1 Black is obliged to defend his b4-pawn by 15...♕a5.

15 g5

15 ♘c5! is a promising continuation. Then 15...dxc5 16 d6 ♕xd6 17 ♕xd6 ♗xd6 18 ♖xd6 gives White excellent play for the pawn, while after 15...a4 16 g5 ♘h5 17 ♘e4 White has transferred his knight to a far more active post.

15...♘fd7 16 h4 ♘b6 17 h5 a4 18 ♘c1 ♘c4 19 ♗xc4 ♕xc4 20 g6

White's pawns land first, but as yet his pieces are poorly placed to reinforce the brave footsoldiers.

20...♘d7 21 gxh7+ ♔h8 22 ♖hg1 b3

Now it's Black's turn.

23 axb3?

23 cxb3 axb3 24 ♘xb3 is the critical line, when although Black has attacking chances along the open queenside files, it isn't clear if he can justify the pawn sacrifice.

23...axb3 24 ♘xb3 ♕a4

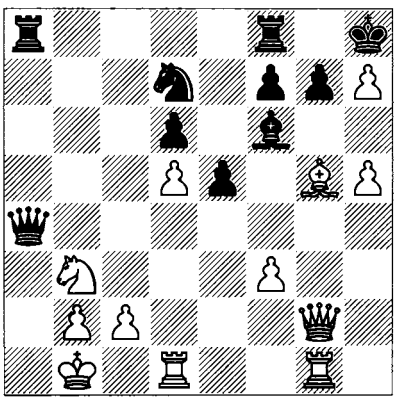
Threatening mate in three, so White creates an escape-route for his king. White's problem is that his attack is on a narrower front than Black's, since only the g-file is available for aggressive purposes.

25 ♕g2 ♗f6

White is attacking with just queen and rook, and Black easily counters the single threat of mate on g7. Black's attack is more flexible, since his pieces can more easily join in.

26 ♗g5?

The most obvious try, but it allows Black a forced win. 26 ♔c1 is better, but 26...♖fc8 is still very promising for Black.



26...♘c5!

Black's attack smashes through one tempo ahead of White's.

27 ♗xf6

27 h6 ♖fc8 also wins for Black.

27...♕a2+ 28 ♔c1 ♘xb3+ 29 cxb3 ♖fc8+ 30 ♔d2 ♕a5+!

30...♕xb2+? is wrong as after 31 ♔e1 Black must exchange queens to avoid being mated.

31 ♔e3 ♕b6+ 32 ♔e2

32 ♔d2 ♕b4+ 33 ♔e3 ♕f4+ 34 ♔d3 ♕d4+ is a win for Black.

32...♖c2+ 33 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 34 ♔xd2 ♕d4+ 0-1

It's mate after 35 ♔c2 ♖c8+ 36 ♔b1 ♕d3+ 37 ♔a2 ♖a8# or 35 ♔e2 ♕xb2+ 36 ♔d3 ♕d4+ 37 ♔e2 ♖a2+ 38 ♔f1 ♕a1#.

48 The Rook-Lift

Shariyazdanov – Petukhov
Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2004

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗d3 ♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 ♘cb4?!

It's unwise for Black to commit himself to this move at such an early stage, since it allows White to play ♘e5 unopposed. 10...♗f6 and 10...♘f6 are more flexible alternatives.

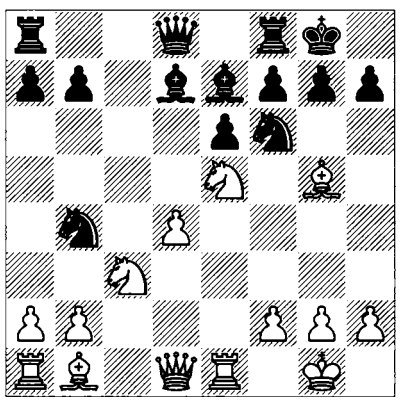
11 ♗b1 ♘f6 12 ♘e5 ♗d7

White has the making of a dangerous attack, but he is unlikely to break through without further reinforcements. For the moment there is no black knight on d5, so the possibility of a rook-lift arises, transferring the rook via e3 to g3 or h3. It must be emphasized that such a manoeuvre carries risks: if the attack fails, then the rook will be left misplaced. However, in this case the benefits outweigh the risks.

13 ♗g5

13 ♖e3! followed by ♖g3 looks more accurate, since in some lines Black has to play ...g6 without being provoked by ♗g5, and in that case the bishop can move directly to h6, saving a tempo.

B



13...♖c8?

This automatic move is too casual and allows White a free hand. Successful defence often depends on recognizing the danger at a sufficiently early stage. Black should play 13...♗c6 14 ♖e3 g6 15 ♖g3 ♘d7! 16 ♗h6 ♘xe5 (forced, or else White breaks through on g6 much as in the game) 17 ♗xf8 ♔xf8 18 dxe5 ♕xd1+ 19 ♘xd1 ♖d8 20 ♘c3 ♖d2, when he will secure a pawn for the exchange, after which his active pieces provide sufficient compensation for the remaining small deficit.

14 ♖e3! g6

There is little choice as 14...♗c6?, for example, loses to 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 17 ♕h5+ ♔g8 18 ♖h3.

15 ♖g3 ♗c6

After 15...♘c6 16 ♗h6 White wins the exchange, as 16...♖e8? allows a sacrificial breakthrough on g6.

16 ♗h6 ♖e8

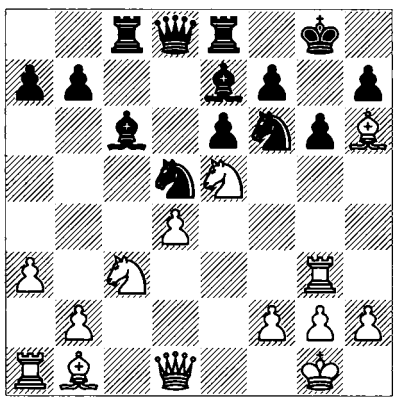
White now has the chance to destroy Black with a double piece sacrifice on g6. There are various ways to execute this combination, but only one is absolutely lethal.

17 a3!

17 ♗xg6? hxg6 18 ♕b1 allows 18...♘c2! 19 ♕xc2 ♗e4 20 ♕d1 ♗f5, when Black has escaped disaster at the cost of losing a pawn.

17...♘bd5

W

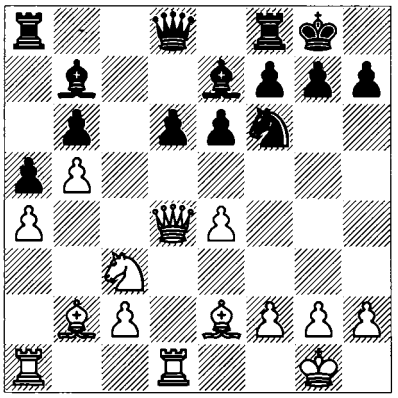


18 ♗xg6!

18 ♘xg6? hxg6 19 ♗xg6 is less clear and after 19...♗d6 20 ♗xf7++ ♔xf7 21 ♖g7+ ♔f8 22 ♘xd5 (22 ♖d7+ ♔g8 23 ♖xd8 ♖exd8 24 ♕f3 still favours White, but is not conclusive) 22...♗xd5 23 ♕d3 ♗e4 24 ♖g3+ ♔f7 a draw was agreed in Filip-Pogats, Budapest 1961.

18...hxg6 19 ♘xg6 fxg6 20 ♕d3 1-0

It's all over after 20...♘f4 21 ♖xg6+ ♔h8 22 ♗xf4 ♖g8 23 ♕h3+ ♘h7 24 ♗e5+.



Radulski – Z. Almasi
European Ch, Plovdiv 2008

This position features a typical Sicilian pawn-structure, but with the notable difference that White has advanced his queenside pawns. This operates in Black's favour, because the c2-pawn is now backward and the squares along the c-file are weak. White, seduced by the line-up of queen and bishop on the long diagonal, decided to play for a kingside attack by transferring his rook to g3. However, if Black can fend off this attack, White will be left with a misplaced rook.

15 ♖d3 ♖c8 16 ♖ad1 ♕c7

Black builds up along the c-file.

17 ♖g3?!

This is the first real commitment White makes with his rook and it's already a mistake. White should accept that he cannot play for an advantage and continue quietly with, for example, 17 ♗f3, awaiting events.

17...♖fd8

It's often said that the correct reaction to a flank attack is to play in the centre. While every rule has exceptions, this one applies more often than not. Black threatens 18...d5! 19 exd5 (19 e5 ♘e4 wins for Black) 19...♗xd5 20 ♘xd5 ♖xd5 21 ♕e3 ♖xd1+ 22 ♗xd1 ♖d8 with strong pressure. Note that it's the offside position of the g3-rook that makes this line so awkward for White.

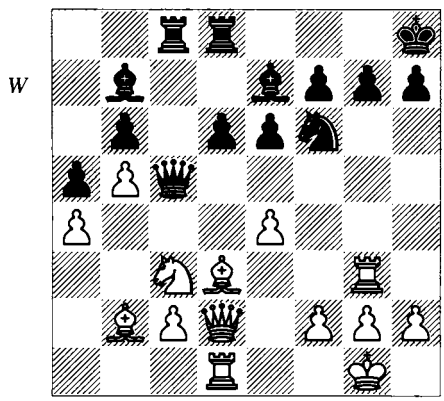
18 ♕d2 ♔h8?!

Black decides to prevent ♕h6 by unpinning the g-pawn, but this rather passive move gives White the chance to retain the balance. The simplest way to counter White's threat is 18...g6!, when 19 ♕h6 ♗f8 20 ♕h4 ♗g7 consolidates the kingside. It may look odd to play ...g6, apparently weakening the long diagonal, but it can always be closed by ...e5 and it's more important to block White's rook activity on the g-file.

19 ♗d3

19 ♕g5 ♖g8 20 ♖h3 is also possible, with a roughly equal position, because the obvious 20...♕c5?! 21 ♕xc5 ♖xc5?! is bad after 22 ♗a3.

19...♕c5!



An excellent move, preventing ♕g5. White's problem is that he has committed himself to an attack and if he does nothing, then Black can steadily improve his position, for example by ...♖d7-c7, and take over the initiative.

20 ♘d5!

This is the best chance because White must try something active.

20...exd5 21 ♕g5?

This is the wrong follow-up. White should force a draw by 21 exd5! ♕xd5 (21...♗xd5 22 ♕g5 ♖g8 23 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 24 ♕f5 ♗e4 25 ♗xe4 ♕xf5 26 ♗xf5 is roughly equal) 22 c4 ♖xc4 23 ♖g5 ♕e6 24 ♗f5 ♕d5 25 ♗d3, with a repetition.

21...♖g8 22 e5 ♘e4 23 ♕f5 dxe5 24 ♗xe4 dxe4 25 ♖h3

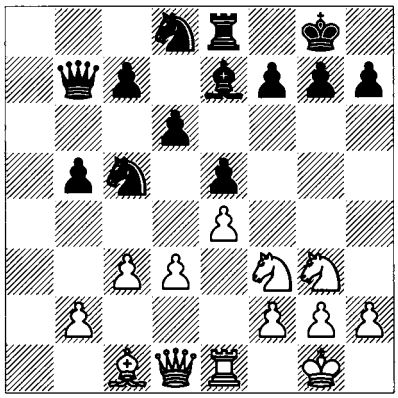
White still has some threats, but accurate play by Black fends them off.

25...h6 26 ♗xe5 f6 27 ♕g6 ♖gd8!

The only move, but a good one. White's attack now collapses because he is threatened with mate on the back rank, a consequence of the commitment involved in playing the rook-lift.

28 ♖xh6+ ♔g8 29 ♕h7+ ♔f8 30 ♖f1 gxh6 31 ♗f4 ♕d5 32 ♗xh6+ ♔e8 0-1

49 Advancing Pawns against the Enemy King



Van Oosterom – Bang
Corr. 2002-4

Pawn advances to weaken the enemy kingside can arise in surprising situations. Here it looks natural to play 19 d4, but after 19...♘d7 20 ♘f5 ♗f8 it's hard to achieve anything because there are no real weaknesses in Black's position. In order to create a weakness, White must use his pawns.

19 h4!

This advance is justified precisely because there is no real tension in the centre, which means that Black will have trouble developing any counterplay there (for example, ...d5 is hard to arrange because of White's pressure against e5). The pawn advance is not so easy to meet, because if Black answers h5 with ...h6 then White's knight will have a superb outpost on f5.

19...♗f8 20 h5 b4 21 d4!

Not 21 h6 g6 22 d4? due to 22...exd4 23 cxd4 ♘xe4 24 d5 f5, securing the knight.

21...exd4 22 cxd4 ♘d7

Now 22...♘xe4 23 d5 f5 24 ♘xf5 is clearly better for White.

23 d5

This move seals the d8-knight out of play. It's wrong to play h6 too soon, because after ...g6 Black can play ...f5 and ...♘f7, activating the knight and attacking h6.

23...c6 24 ♗e3 cxd5 25 exd5 ♕b5 26 ♕d4

A case of 'the threat is stronger than its execution'. It's very irritating for Black to have to worry about h6 every move.

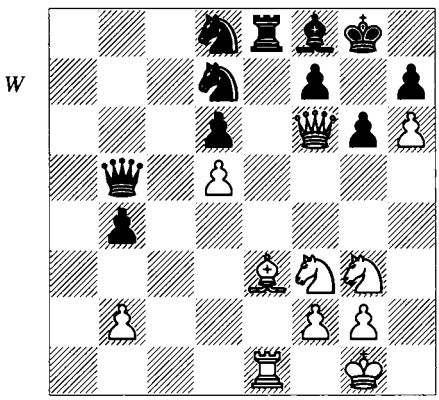
26...♘c5?!

Black should probably try 26...h6, although after 27 ♖d1 White stands well due to his space advantage and the possibility of occupying f5 with a knight.

27 h6

At last this move is effective, since weakening the f6-square now produces concrete results. However, it requires an accurate follow-up to take advantage of the weakness.

27...g6 28 ♕f6 ♘d7



29 ♘e4! ♖e7

29...♘xf6 30 ♘xf6+ ♔h8 31 ♘xe8 ♘e6 32 dxe6 ♕xe8 33 e7! ♗xe7 34 ♗d4+ ♔g8 35 ♗f6 is winning for White, while 29...♖xe4 30 ♕xd8 ♖e7 31 ♖c1 is also extremely unpleasant for Black.

30 ♖a1!!

A spectacular method of exploiting the f6-square.

30...♕b7

30...♘xf6 31 ♘xf6+ ♔h8 32 ♖a8 ♖e8 (the alternative 32...♗xh6 33 ♖xd8+ ♔g7 34 ♗d4 is also hopeless for Black) 33 ♗d4 gives White a decisive attack.

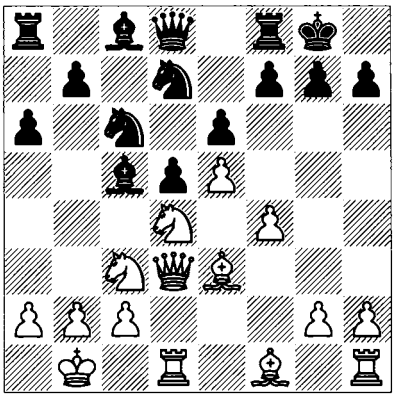
31 ♕d4

The queen must retreat now that ♖a8 has been prevented, but the damage has been done. Black has serious kingside weaknesses and cannot cope with the many threats, such as 32 ♘xd6, 32 ♖a7 and 32 ♗g5.

31...f5 32 ♘xd6 ♕b8 33 ♗f4 ♕b6 34 ♘c8 1-0

B. Savchenko – Nikolenko
Moscow Ch 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 ♗e3 cxd4 8 ♘xd4 ♗c5 9 ♕d3 0-0 10 0-0-0 a6 11 ♔b1



In this opposite-side castling situation, White will attack on the kingside and Black on the queenside. Although Black's kingside lacks piece defence, White's own pieces are not especially well placed for an assault on the king, so the main burden of the attack will fall on White's kingside pawns, which must first advance so as to create weaknesses. In this case the attack is based on the advance of several pawns.

11...♕c7?!

A doubtful move, as it is not at all clear that this is the best square for the queen. 11...♘xd4 12 ♗xd4 b5 is more flexible, keeping the choice of square for the queen open for the moment.

12 h4

The h-pawn is the first foot-soldier to push forward.

12...b5 13 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 14 ♗xc5 ♘xc5 15 ♕e3

The exchange of dark-squared bishops favours White positionally, as the e3-bishop was his bad bishop. However, in situations involving direct attacks, such factors are less important than the strength of the respective attacks.

15...b4 16 ♘e2 ♗d7?!

Black spends a tempo moving the bishop to a square where it is not very active. 16...a5 is correct, pushing forward with the pawns as fast as possible and opening up the possibility of ...♗a6, which would put the bishop on a much better square.

17 h5 ♖fc8 18 ♘d4 ♕b6 19 g4!?

An interesting decision. White does not push ahead with h6 as soon as possible, because he may prefer to play g5-g6. The option to play h6 will always remain, since if Black prevents it by playing ...h6, White can quickly open a file by playing g5.

19...♘e4

Threatening to win by 20...♘c3+, but this is easily averted.

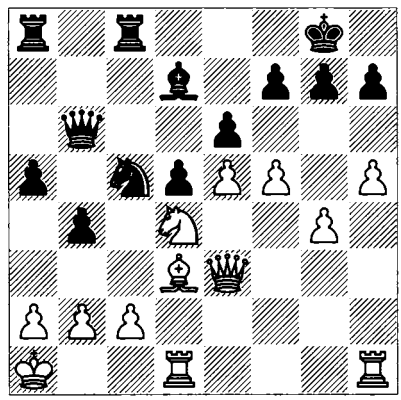
20 ♔a1 a5

Now the only way forward for Black's attack is to advance the a-pawn.

21 ♗d3 ♘c5?

Retreating the knight is an admission of defeat. 21...a4 was the only chance and while 22 ♗xe4 dxe4 23 ♕xe4 a3 24 b3 ♕c5 gives White a clear advantage, at least Black has some counterplay. When defending bad positions, it's essential to cause some problems for the opponent and not just roll over and die.

22 f5!



This is even more unpleasant than playing h6, because f6 will tear holes in Black's kingside.

22...a4 23 f6 ♕d8

To meet ♕g5 with ...♕f8.

24 g5

The pawn tsunami is about to strike.

24...a3 25 g6 axb2+ 26 ♔b1 ♘xd3 27 gxh7+ ♔h8 28 fxg7+ ♔xg7 29 ♖dg1+ ♔xh7

29...♔h8 30 ♕h6 leads to mate.

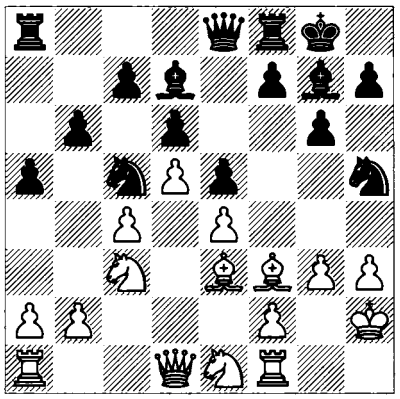
30 ♕g3 1-0

30...♕f8 31 h6 followed by ♕g7+ is fatal.

50 Bringing up the Reserves

Vescovi – Radjabov
World Team Ch, Bursa 2010

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 h3 e5 7 d5 ♘h5 8 g3 a5 9 ♗g2 ♘a6 10 0-0 ♘c5 11 ♗e3 ♗d7 12 ♘e1 b6 13 ♔h2 ♕e8 14 ♗f3



14...f5!?

The start of a tactical sequence which leads to great complications.

15 exf5 e4 16 ♗e2

16 ♗xh5 gxh5 is fine for Black in view of the weakness on d3.

16...♗xf5 17 g4

This will eventually win material, but at the cost of exposing the white king. However, nothing else offers White any chance of an advantage.

17...♕e5+ 18 ♔g1

18 ♔g2? ♘f4+ 19 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 20 gxf5? ♗e5 21 ♖h1 ♖xf5 wins for Black.

18...♘f4!

A brave decision, playing for the attack rather than regaining some of the material by 18...♘g3 19 gxf5 ♘xf1 20 ♗xf1 ♕xf5 21 ♕d2. Here White has a slight advantage with no risk, so the move played is a much better practical choice.

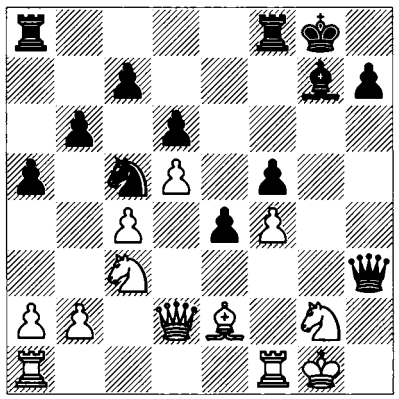
19 ♗xf4 ♕xf4 20 ♘g2

20 gxf5? loses to 20...♗e5, so first the queen must be driven back.

20...♕h6 21 gxf5 gxf5 22 f4?

After this Black's attack becomes very strong. 22 ♕c1! is correct, the main line being 22...f4 23 ♗g4 ♔h8 24 f3 ♗d4+ 25 ♔h2 ♖g8 and while White may be objectively a little better, Black still has dangerous attacking chances.

22...♕xh3 23 ♕d2



The key position. In order to press home his attack, Black needs to bring his reserves into play. At the moment only the queen is directly participating, although Black's minor pieces are well placed to join in. In particular, Black needs to be able to transfer his rooks to the g-file. He could continue ...♖f6-g6, but this wouldn't help the a8-rook to reach the g-file. It's better to play ...♔f7, which gives both rooks access to the g-file, even though at the moment the bishop is blocking the file. In the main line (see 24 ♕e3 below) Black must be prepared to sacrifice his bishop to get his rooks quickly into the attack.

23...♔f7! 24 ♖fe1

The main defence 24 ♕e3 loses to 24...♗d4!! 25 ♕xd4 ♖g8 26 ♖f2 (26 ♕f2 ♖g6 27 ♖fe1 ♖ag8 28 ♗f1 ♖h6 also wins for Black) 26...♖g3! 27 ♖e1 (27 ♗f1 ♖ag8 28 ♖c2 ♖8g6 29 ♖e1 ♘d3 followed by ...♖h6 is decisive) 27...♖ag8 28 ♗f1 ♖8g6 and Black wins as before.

24...♖g8 25 ♗f1 ♘d3

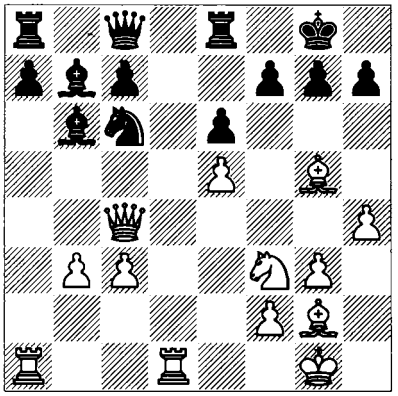
Now that Black's whole army has joined in the attack, White's position is hopeless.

26 ♘b5 ♗h6 27 ♖e3 ♘xf4!

A spectacular finish.

28 ♖xh3 ♘xh3+ 29 ♔h2 ♗xd2 30 ♔xh3 ♖g5! 31 ♖d1 ♖ag8 32 ♖xd2 ♖h5+ 33 ♘h4 ♖g4 34 ♔h2 ♖gxh4+ 35 ♔g1 ♖h1+ 0-1

36 ♔f2 ♖5h2+ 37 ♗g2 f4 is terminal.



Zemerov – Krivko
Russia Cup, Omsk 1996

White has some advantage due to his more active pieces and better queenside pawn-structure. Black's next move is really playing with fire.

19...h6?!

If White had to retreat then this would be a good idea, but in view of the absence of black defensive pieces on the kingside it is not surprising that White can sacrifice. However, since White's pieces are also not ideally placed for kingside action, it requires high-quality play to press the attack home.

20 ♗xh6!

The correct decision; 20 ♗f6!? is also good, but less forcing since Black need not take.

20...gxh6 21 ♕g4+ ♔h7

The lines 21...♔h8?! 22 ♕f4 ♔g8 23 ♕xh6 and 21...♔f8?! 22 ♕f4 ♖d8 23 ♕xh6+ ♔e7 24 ♕f6+ ♔e8 25 ♘g5 ♖d7 26 ♕g7 are dead lost, so this is forced.

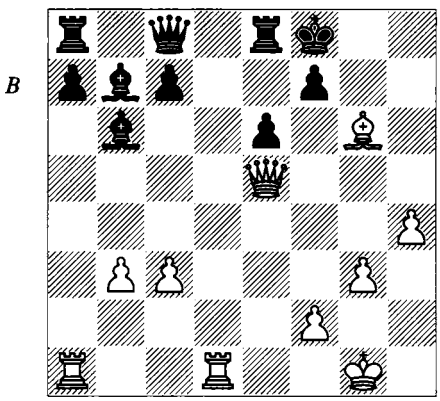
22 ♘g5+?

White throws another piece into the attack, but Black can defend because not enough white pieces are participating. Had White thought more about bringing up the reserves, he would probably have found the winning continuation 22 ♖a4! (the a1-rook is the most distant piece, and when it joins the attack, the whole white army will be in an aggressive position) 22...♖g8 (22...♘e7 loses to 23 ♕h5 ♔g7 24 ♘g5! hxg5 25 ♕xg5+ ♔h7 26 ♖g4 ♘g6 27 h5) 23 ♕h5 ♖g6 (23...♖xg3 24 ♘g5+ ♖xg5 25 hxg5 ♘xe5 26 ♖f4 ♗xg2 27 g6+ fxg6 28 ♕xe5 ♕e8 29 ♔xg2 is winning for White as he retains a strong attack) 24 ♘g5+ ♔g7 25 ♘xf7! ♔xf7 (25...♘d4 26 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 27 ♖dxd4 ♗xd4 28 ♖xd4 ♕c6 29 ♘d8 ♕e8 30 ♕d1 is also excellent for White) 26 ♖f4+ ♔g7 27 ♗e4 ♖xg3+ 28 ♔h2 ♕e8 29 ♕xe8 ♖xe8 30 ♔xg3 ♖e7 (material is roughly level, but White has a massive positional advantage) 31 h5 a5 32 ♔h3 ♖f7 33 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7 34 ♖d7+ ♔g8 35 f4 and Black is totally helpless.

22...hxg5 23 ♗e4+ ♔g7 24 ♕xg5+ ♔f8 25 ♕h6+ ♔e7 26 ♕f6+ ♔f8 27 ♗g6

The key moment. Black is two pieces up and can defend by returning some of the material.

27...♘xe5! 28 ♕xe5



28...♔e7?

A serious mistake losing at once. Moving the king doesn't improve Black's position as White can just check again, so he should have used the tempo more constructively. 28...♖d8! draws; for example, 29 ♕f6 (29 ♗xf7 ♖xd1+ 30 ♖xd1 ♔xf7 31 ♕h5+ ♔g7 is also a draw) 29...♖d7 30 ♖e1 ♕d8 31 ♕h8+ ♔e7 32 ♕g7 ♕e8 33 ♖xe6+ ♔xe6 34 ♗f5+ (34 ♖e1+ ♔d6 35 ♕f6+ ♔c5 36 b4+ ♔b5 37 ♕f5+ c5 38 c4+ ♔xc4 39 ♕c2+ ♔b5 40 ♗d3+ ♔c6 41 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 favours Black) 34...♔xf5 35 ♕g5+ ♔e6 36 ♖e1+ ♔d6 37 ♕f4+ ♔c6 38 ♕a4+ with perpetual check.

Black could also draw by 28...c5! (clearing c7 for the queen) 29 ♕f6 ♕c7 30 h5 ♔g8 31 ♗c2 ♕e7 32 ♕h6 f6 33 ♕g6+ ♔f8 with perpetual check.

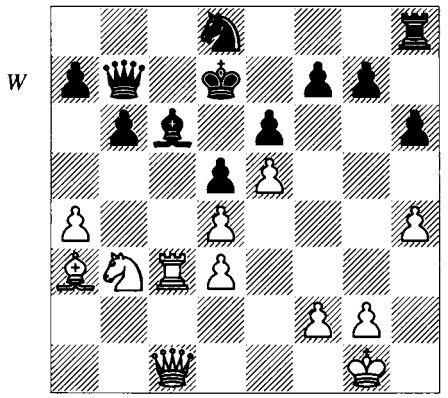
29 ♕g5+ f6

29...♔f8 30 ♕f6 leads to a quick mate.

30 ♕h6 ♗d5 31 ♖xd5 exd5 32 ♖e1+ ♔d6 33 ♗xe8 c6 34 ♕f4+ 1-0

51 Excluding Defensive Pieces

An attack can be strengthened by the exclusion of important defensive pieces from the main area of attack. This can be achieved by creating threats on another part of the board, but in this section we shall deal with two more direct methods. The first is physically blocking the path of the defensive piece.



Nunn – S. Williams
London (King's Head) 1995

White stands better, since Black's king is trapped in the centre by the action of White's bishop on the a3-f8 diagonal. However, Black's position is quite solid and at the moment White cannot break through directly. Instead he must first manoeuvre to increase his advantage.

27 a5

A good move, which opens more lines on the queenside and relieves White of the continual need to defend the a4-pawn. The only downside is that by opening the a-file, White might give Black the chance to activate his rook along that file later. Indeed, the rest of the game revolves around Black's rook and White's attempts to prevent it from entering the game.

27...♖g8

For the moment Black cannot undertake anything active.

28 axb6 axb6 29 ♗d6

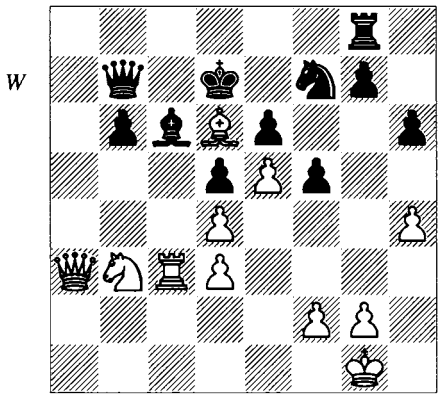
White need not hurry, and it is slightly more accurate to play 29 h5! first.

29...f5

Now if Black had time to play ...♘f7 followed by ...♖a8 then he would have solved all his problems, so it's essential for White to take steps to prevent the rook's activation.

30 ♕a3 ♘f7?!

30...♔e8 is more resilient, although White retains considerable pressure.



31 ♗f8!

This is the key move, directly blocking the rook's path along the first rank. It also threatens 32 ♕e7+, so Black doesn't have time to expel the bishop by playing his queen to the first rank.

31 ♖xc6! ♔xc6 32 ♕a4+ b5 33 ♕a3 is also promising, but I couldn't see a clear line after 33...♕b6 so I preferred to avoid taking the risk of sacrificing material. In fact, the computer shows that 34 ♗f8! is very effective, using the same basic idea as in the game.

31...♔c8?!

This loses directly, but even after the best defence, 31...♘d8, White can continue 32 ♕e7+ ♔c8 33 ♕b4 g5 34 ♗e7 ♘f7 35 h5, when Black is totally tied up. Attempting to extract the rook by 35...♔d7? fails because White again plays 36 ♗f8!, after which 36...♔c8 loses to 37 ♗xh6 ♘xh6 38 ♕d6.

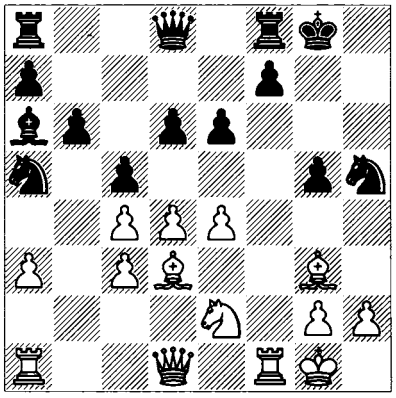
32 ♘a1!

32 ♘c1! is equally effective. In both cases the idea is the same: to play the knight to b4, exerting crushing pressure against the c6-bishop.

32...g5 33 ♘c2 ♘d8

This attempt to defend the c6-bishop fails as the knight can easily be eliminated by ♗e7.

34 ♗e7 gxh4 35 ♗xd8 ♔xd8 36 ♕d6+ ♗d7 37 ♘b4 ♖g7 38 ♕f8+ 1-0



Zhao Jun – Xiu Deshun
Chinese Ch, Xinghua Jiangsu 2011

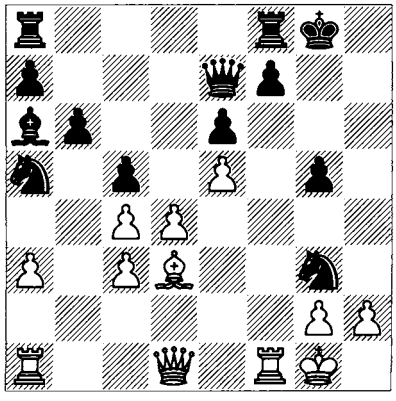
Sometimes it's necessary to take drastic measures to prevent defensive forces from arriving in the danger zone. Here Black's kingside has been weakened by pawn advances, but there's no obvious way to break down the defences. White must be quick, for otherwise Black will take on c4 and interfere with White's attacking plans.

16 ♗xd6!!

An extraordinarily imaginative attacking idea which shows a touch of genius: White is willing to offer two pieces to keep Black's forces away from the kingside. The slightly less spectacular 16 ♘f4! ♘xg3 (16...♘xf4 17 ♗xf4 f6 18 ♕h5 ♕e8 19 ♕h6 gives White a winning attack) 17 hxg3 ♗xc4 18 ♘h5 is also very dangerous, but is less forcing than the move played.

16...♕xd6 17 e5 ♕e7 18 ♘g3! ♘xg3

18...♘f4 19 ♖xf4 gxf4 20 ♕g4+ leads to mate, while 18...♘g7 19 ♘e4 gives White a decisive attack, so Black is forced to take.



19 ♖f6!!

This is the brilliant point of White's attack. Recapturing the knight is less important than preventing ...f5, which would allow Black's queen to help defend the kingside. With the rook on f6, Black's pieces are unable to come to the king's aid.

19...♔g7

19...♗xc4 is the most obvious defensive attempt, but after 20 hxg3 ♗xd3 21 ♕xd3 ♔g7 22 ♕e3 ♖g8 23 ♖af1 ♘c6 (23...♔f8 24 ♕f3 attacks a8 and f7) 24 ♕xg5+ ♔f8 25 ♕h5 ♘d8 26 d5! exd5 27 e6 White's attack breaks through decisively. This line is interesting because it shows that White may not be able to win just by playing on the kingside, since Black's king can run away. In order to secure victory, White's kingside threats have to be combined with a breakthrough in the centre. This is another example of the interconnectedness of middlegame play; the very first move of White's combination eliminated the d6-pawn, giving him a 2 to 1 central majority which he could use to press home his attack.

20 ♕g4! ♖g8 21 hxg3

The moment comes to recover one of the sacrificed pieces. Currently White has only one pawn for the remaining piece, but all his pieces can easily take part in the attack. Black has managed to get one rook to help with the defence, but the f6-rook cuts his position in half and his minor pieces are too far away to help.

21...♘b7

Heading for d8 to defend f7, but this provides only a temporary respite.

22 ♖af1 ♘d8 23 ♕e4

The central breakthrough 23 d5! exd5 24 ♕h5 ♔f8 25 e6 provides the simplest win, but the move played is also effective.

23...♕b7 24 d5 ♖h8 25 ♕g6+!

A spectacular finish for an amazing game.

25...fxg6

Or 25...♔f8 26 dxe6 and there is no defence to the threat of 27 ♖xf7+.

26 ♖xg6+

Now it's a forced mate.

26...♔h7 27 ♖xg5+ ♔h6 28 ♖g6+ ♔h7 29 ♖g4+ ♔h6 30 ♖f6+ ♔h5 31 ♖h4+ 1-0

White mates next move.

52 Opening Files against the King

Files can be opened against the enemy king by pawn exchanges, but it's also possible to open such a file by means of a sacrifice. The simplest case arises when the defender grabs a pawn and opens the file himself.

Aleksandrov – Sandipan
Kolkata 2004

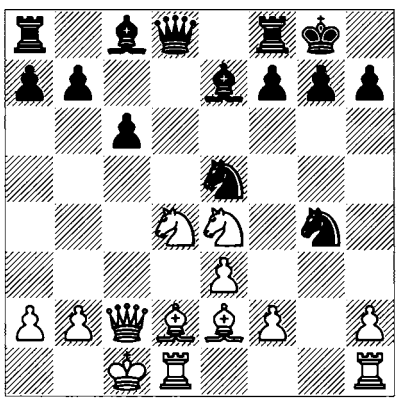
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♘bd7 6 ♕c2 ♗d6 7 g4 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 e5 9 ♗d2!?

The most combative move, offering the g-pawn to open a file against Black's kingside.

9...exd4 10 ♘xd4 ♘e5 11 ♗e2 ♘fxg4?!

All three captures of the pawn are playable, but 11...♘exg4 may well be the most accurate, since with knights on e5 and g4 Black is vulnerable to the thrust f4.

12 ♘e4 ♗e7 13 0-0-0 0-0



It's obviously dangerous to castle in front of the open g-file, but Black doesn't have much choice as castling queenside would take too long and in any case White's control of the d-file would make castling hard to arrange.

14 f4 ♘g6

Black loses time because he took on g4 with the wrong knight.

15 ♖hg1 ♘f6 16 ♘g3?!

The plan of ♗c3 and ♘df5, targeting the g7-square, is tempting but complicated. The simplest path is 16 f5! ♘f4 17 exf4 ♕xd4 18 ♗c3 ♕e3+ 19 ♔b1 ♔h8 20 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 21 ♗xf6 gxf6 22 ♗d3 (threatening ♕c3), when Black will not be able to develop his queenside. The main line runs 22...♖g8 23 ♖xg8+ ♔xg8 24 ♕g2+ ♔f8 25 ♗c2 a5 26 a4! ♖b8 27 ♕g4, followed by ♕h5, and White wins.

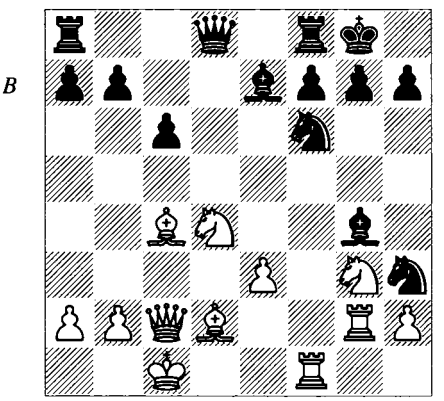
16...♘xf4

It's understandable that Black takes the second pawn, since otherwise f5 will force open the g-file. The danger lies in the opening of another file against Black's king.

17 ♗c4 ♘h3?

The knight doesn't belong here since it does nothing to block the g-file. In such a position, material is less important than the soundness of Black's defensive set-up. 17...♗g4! 18 ♘gf5 ♘g6, putting as many obstructions as possible on the g-file, gives Black fair defensive chances.

18 ♖g2 ♗g4 19 ♖f1



19...c5?

Chasing the knight where it wants to go. 19...♘d5 is a better chance, but White retains a large advantage after 20 ♘gf5 h5 21 ♗e2 c5 22 ♗xg4 hxg4 23 ♖xg4 ♗g5 24 ♘f3 ♘b4 25 ♗xb4 cxb4 26 ♘xg5 ♘xg5 27 ♔b1 since his attack is worth far more than Black's extra pawn.

20 ♘df5 ♘g5 21 ♗c3

With the rooks lined up on the f- and g-files and all White's other pieces in attacking positions, the end cannot be far off.

21...♗h3 22 ♘xg7! ♗xg2 23 ♕xg2 ♔xg7 24 h4 h6 25 hxg5 hxg5 26 ♘f5+ ♔g6 27 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 28 ♗d3+ 1-0

28...♘e4 29 ♗f6! ♕xf6 30 ♕xe4+ and White mates in two more moves.

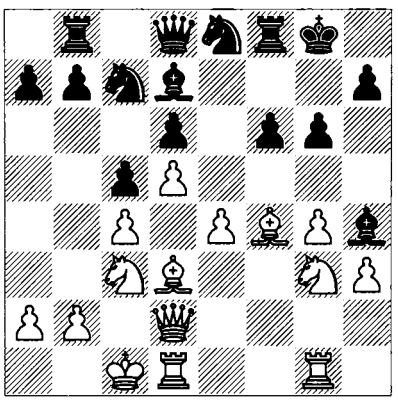
Sometimes it's even worth a piece to open a crucial file.

Gonzalez Zamora – Zapata
Merida 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗d3 0-0 6 ♘ge2 e5 7 d5 c5 8 h3 ♘e8 9 g4 ♘a6?!

There doesn't seem much point in playing ...♘e8 if Black does not now continue 9...♕h4 10 ♘g3 (10 ♘g1!? is an interesting idea, preventing ...♗h6) 10...♗h6, which at least exchanges his bad bishop. In this case White is restricted to a slight advantage.

10 ♗e3 ♗d7 11 ♘g3 ♗f6 12 ♕d2 ♗h4 13 ♖g1 f6 14 0-0-0 ♖b8 15 f4 exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♘ac7



White has built up an attacking formation on the kingside, but there's no simple way through Black's defences since he has control of g5. If White delays, Black will generate counterplay by ...b5. The solution is to offer a piece to open the g-file. Although there is no immediate win, White's threats keep Black on the defensive and give him time to reinforce his attack.

17 ♘f5! gxf5

Black must accept, since 17...♗g5 18 ♗xg5 fxg5 19 h4 gxh4 (19...gxf5 20 gxf5 is also winning for White) 20 e5 dxe5 21 d6 gives White a decisive attack.

18 gxf5+ ♔h8 19 ♖g4 ♗g5 20 ♖dg1

It's surprising that Black is so helpless given that White's threats are fairly slow, but Black's cramped position prevents him from feeding pieces across to the threatened kingside.

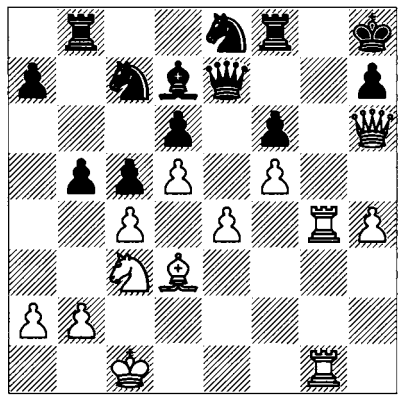
20...b5

Since Black cannot do much to shore up his defences, he aims for counterplay.

21 h4 ♗xf4 22 ♕xf4

The immediate threat is 23 ♕g3 and 24 ♖g8+, so Black's reply is forced.

22...♕e7 23 ♕h6



The threats along the open g-file completely tie Black down on the kingside, and White only has to play his knight to g6 (via e2 and f4) to finish the job.

23...bxc4 24 ♗c2

It's important not to become overconfident and think that anything will win. Here 24 ♘e2? cxd3 25 ♘f4 is wrong since Black can escape by 25...♗xf5! 26 exf5 ♕e3+ 27 ♔b1 ♖xb2+! 28 ♔xb2 ♕d2+ forcing perpetual check. However, White only has to make a cautious retreat with his bishop and Black will no longer have a defence against the knight manoeuvre.

24...♘b5 25 ♘e2 c3 26 bxc3

The simplest solution; 26 ♘f4?! ♗xf5 27 exf5?? (27 b3! still wins) is a blunder due to 27...♕e3+ 28 ♔b1 ♘a3+ and mate next move.

26...♖b7

26...♘xc3 27 ♘xc3 ♗b5 prevents the knight from reaching g6, but loses to the breakthrough 28 e5 dxe5 (or 28...fxe5 29 ♘e4 followed by f6) 29 d6 ♕f7 30 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 31 d7.

27 ♖4g3

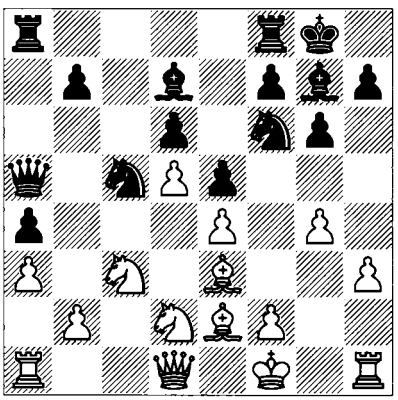
27 ♘f4 ♗xf5 28 ♖4g3! (28 exf5?? loses to 28...♕e3+) also wins, but is unnecessarily complicated. By covering e3, White prevents the trick with ...♗xf5 and now ♘f4 is a simple and unanswerable threat.

27...♘xc3 28 ♘f4 ♗xf5 29 exf5 1-0

53 Attack against the Fianchetto

In many positions, one player has a fianchettoed bishop in front of his king. Let's assume that Black has a bishop on g7, pawns on f7, g6 and h7 and a knight on f6. Compared to a normal castled position with pawns on f7, g7 and h7, the fianchettoed position has several advantages. First of all, Black has a defensive bishop already in place, which prevents a direct attack on g7. Moreover, h7 is also normally secure as the b1-h7 diagonal is blocked by the g6-pawn. However, there is also a downside. It's generally easier for White to open a file against a fianchettoed position, since h4-h5 will generally lead to a pawn exchange on g6. If White has a rook on h1, this attacking idea is especially effective. Another point is that while the bishop stays on g7, Black's kingside dark squares are normally pretty secure, but if it is exchanged (for example, by ♗h6) then squares such as h6 and g7 can become targets for White's attack. In the following position, the preconditions for an attack by h4-h5 are all there.

W



Riazantsev – Kokarev
Ulan Ude 2009

15 h4 b5 16 h5 ♖fb8

Black prepares ...b4, since the immediate 16...b4 17 ♘c4 ♕d8 18 axb4 ♘cxe4 19 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 20 ♘b6 ♖b8 21 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 22 ♖xa4 favours White.

17 g5 ♘e8 18 hxg6 hxg6

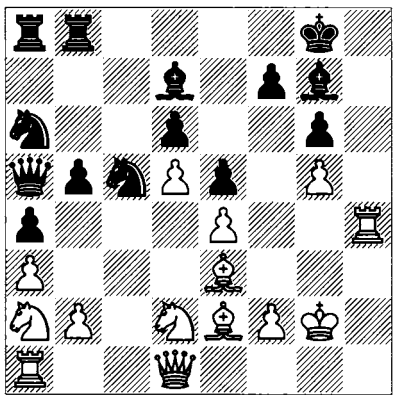
18...fxg6 prevents the complete opening of the h-file, but after 19 ♗g4, followed by ♕f3-h3, Black's kingside comes under fire in any case.

19 ♘a2!

White's attack won't produce a serious threat for a few moves, so it's essential to hold up Black's queenside play. Playing the single move ♘a2 forces Black to spend two moves (...♘c7 and ...♘7a6) reinforcing ...b4. This not only gains a tempo but also draws the e8-knight away from any possible defensive duties on the kingside.

19...♘c7 20 ♔g2 ♘7a6 21 ♖h4

B



Preparing to bring the queen to h1.

21...f5

Desperation, but other lines lose by force; for example, 21...b4 22 ♕h1! bxa3 23 ♖h7 with the unanswerable threat of 24 ♖xg7+ ♔xg7 25 ♕h6+ ♔g8 26 ♖h1, or 21...♕d8 22 ♕h1 ♘b3 23 ♘xb3 axb3 24 ♖h7 ♕f8 25 ♕h4! bxa2 26 ♖h1 with a decisive attack for White.

22 gxf6 ♗xf6 23 ♕h1!

The fianchettoed bishop is often the only thing holding the kingside together and it is frequently worth more than a rook.

23...♕d8

23...♗xh4 loses to 24 ♕xh4 ♕d8 25 ♗g5 ♕f8 26 ♗f6 ♔f7 27 ♖h1 ♘b3 28 ♘f3 followed by ♘g5+.

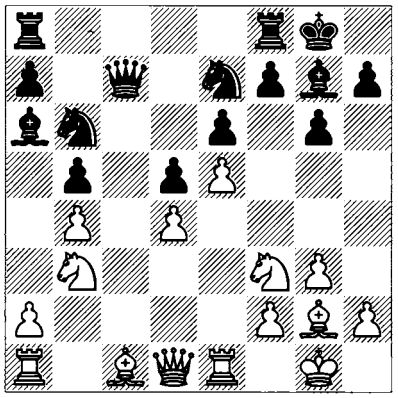
24 ♖h7 ♖b7 25 ♕h2 ♗e8 26 ♖h1 ♖g7 27 ♖xg7+ ♗xg7 28 ♕h7+ ♔f8 29 ♗h6 ♗xh6

Or 29...♕f6 30 ♕h8+ ♔f7 31 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 32 ♖h7 and White wins.

30 ♕xh6+ ♔e7 31 ♗g4 1-0

Cutting off the king's escape-route, after which ♕g5+ will finish the game.

W



Zablotsky – Khismatullin
Voronezh 2008

Here again Black's kingside is defended by a fianchettoed bishop. White's strategy involves the usual two basic elements: softening up the kingside by h4-h5, which is helpful even without a rook on h1, and exchanging the defensive g7-bishop. Here White is aided by his substantial positional advantage, based on his c5-outpost and the inactive a6-bishop, which limits Black's possibilities for counterplay.

16 h4 ♘c6 17 h5 ♖fe8

17...♘xb4 is bad due to 18 h6 ♗h8 19 ♗a3, so Black moves his rook off the vulnerable a3-f8 diagonal.

18 ♘c5 ♗b7 19 ♘h2!

A key move. White can defend the b4-pawn by 19 a3, but after 19...a5 20 ♖b1 axb4 21 axb4 ♘c4 followed by ...♖a2 Black has significant counterplay. By offering the b-pawn, White prevents any lines from being opened on the queenside, at least for some time, and this gives him the chance to press ahead on the kingside.

19...♘xb4 20 ♘g4

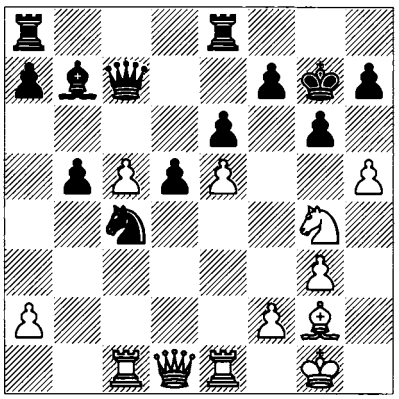
Preparing ♗h6 to exchange the dark-squared bishop, and taking aim at the resulting weak f6-square.

20...♘a6 21 ♗h6?

Being too clever. By 21 h6 ♗h8 22 ♕f3 f5 23 exf6 ♘xc5 24 ♗f4 ♕f7 25 dxc5 ♘d7 26 ♘e5 ♘xe5 27 ♗xe5 ♖f8 28 ♕e2 ♗xf6 29 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 30 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 31 ♖xe6 White secures a large positional advantage based on his better bishop and dangerous passed c-pawn. The move played aims for a direct attack on the king, but the success of this attack is far from guaranteed.

21...♘xc5 22 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 23 ♖c1 ♘c4 24 dxc5

B



24...h6?!

Black tries to secure his shaky dark squares, but this move weakens g6. He should play simply 24...♕xc5, when White has attacking chances for the two pawns (for example by 25 ♘f6), but he doesn't as yet have enough pieces in the attack to break through Black's defences.

25 ♕d4

White defends the useful c5-pawn while forcing Black to meet the threat of ♕f4.

25...♕e7 26 ♖c3

This rook is heading for the weakened f6-square to exert pressure on both f7 and g6.

26...♖ec8 27 ♖f3 ♕g5?

It's also bad to play 27...♖xc5? since after 28 ♖f6 ♖c7 29 hxg6 fxg6 30 ♗f1 followed by ♗d3 Black is in serious trouble. 27...♖c7! is the best defence, when White has enough for the pawn, but probably no more than that.

28 hxg6 fxg6 29 ♖f6 ♖c6 30 ♖e4!

Playing for mate is now totally justified. With four white pieces in the attack, Black has no chance to defend.

30...♖c7

30...dxe4 loses to 31 ♕d7+ ♔h8 32 ♖f7, followed by ♖h7+ and mate, while after 30...♕c1+ 31 ♔h2 ♖c7 32 c6! ♗xc6 (32...♖xc6 33 ♖ef4 ♖c7 34 ♕d3 is also decisive) 33 ♖xe6 dxe4 34 ♖xc6! ♖xc6 35 e6+ White has a crushing attack.

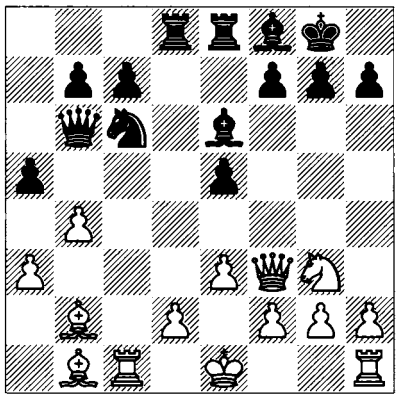
31 ♖ef4 h5 32 ♗f1! hxg4 33 ♖xg4 ♕h5 34 ♗d3 ♕xe5 35 ♖gxg6+ ♔h8 36 ♕h4+ 1-0

White forces mate after 36...♖h7 37 ♖g8+ ♖xg8 38 ♕xh7#.

54 The Deadly Long Diagonal

The long diagonal leading to the enemy king position presents a potential attacking avenue, which can often be exploited by a line-up of queen and bishop.

W



Chatalbashev – Sarić
Zadar 2008

At first glance, the position looks rather promising for Black. White has not yet castled, while all Black's pieces are developed and his rooks in particular have occupied active positions on the central files. Moreover, Black is attacking the vulnerable b-pawn. White's only real asset is the aggressive position of his bishops, pointing at the relatively undefended enemy kingside. Combined with the queen and knight, they offer a dangerous attacking potential.

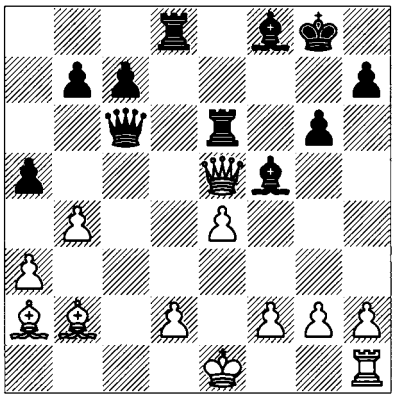
16 ♕e4

White aims to force Black to play ...g6, weakening the long diagonal.

16...g6?!

Black collapses and allows White to win relatively easily. The main line arising after Black's best defence is an instructive illustration of the power of an attack along two parallel diagonals: 16...f5 17 ♘xf5 g6 18 ♖xc6! (not 18 ♘g3? ♕b5, when Black is at least equal since he has prevented the ♖xc6 and ♕xe5 idea, while at the same time stopping castling) 18...♕xc6 (after 18...bxc6 19 ♕xe5 ♗xf5 20 ♗a2+ ♖d5 21 ♕xe8 White wins at once) 19 ♕xe5 ♗xf5 20 ♗a2+ ♖e6 (Black must vacate e8 since 20...♗e6 21 ♕h8+ ♔f7 22 ♕xh7+ leads to mate) 21 e4!!.

B



This is an extremely hard move to see because it looks suicidal to weaken the e-file when Black's rook is on e6; however, there's no simple way for Black to unpin this rook. After 21...♕d7 22 ♕h8+ ♔f7 23 0-0 ♗g4 (23...♗xe4 24 ♕f6+ ♔e8 25 ♗xe6 wins for White) 24 h3 ♔e8 25 hxg4 ♖xe4 26 ♗f6 ♖a8 27 b5! Black is dead lost since he is virtually paralysed. White will eventually drive the rook off the e-file with fatal consequences.

17 ♖xc6!

This is a much simpler version of the same idea. Eliminating the knight allows White to line up his queen and bishop on the long diagonal.

17...♕xc6 18 ♕xe5 f6

Black is already forced into desperate measures in order to avoid mate.

19 ♕xf6 ♖e7 20 ♕h8+ ♔f7 21 ♕xh7+ ♔e8 22 ♕xg6+ ♖f7

After 22...♗f7 23 ♕xc6+ bxc6 24 ♗f6 White regains the exchange and is several pawns up.

23 ♘e4

With four pawns and a raging attack for the exchange, White's advantage is overwhelming.

23...♗e7 24 0-0 axb4 25 axb4 ♔d7 26 ♖c1 ♕d5 27 ♘c3 ♕e5 28 d4 ♕g7 29 d5 ♗g4 30 ♘b5

Attacking c7 and g7 simultaneously.

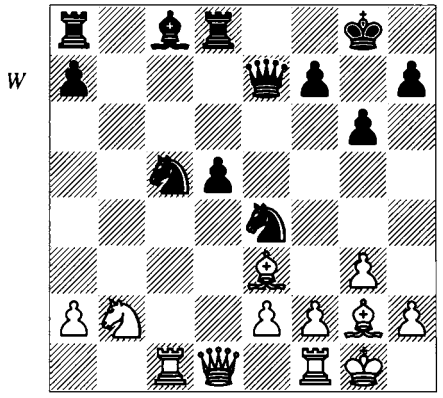
30...♕xb2

No better is 30...♕xg6 31 ♗xg6.

31 ♖xc7+ ♔e8 32 ♕g8+ 1-0

It's mate after 32...♗f8 33 ♕xf7# or 32...♖f8 33 ♗g6#.

The following game features a curious battle of the long diagonals.



Nikolić – Baramidze
Dutch Team Ch 2006/7

White has a substantial positional advantage. He has the two bishops and Black suffers from an isolated d-pawn, but it is especially noticeable that Black's kingside dark squares are vulnerable, and, in the absence of a dark-squared bishop of his own, this represents a permanent weakness.

17 ♗xe4?

17 ♘d3 ♘e6 18 ♘f4 ♘xf4 19 ♗xf4 is simpler, not only maintaining all White's assets but also opening the c-file for a possible rook penetration.

17...♘xe4 18 ♕d4

Now if only White could get his bishop to the long diagonal, Black would be in serious trouble.

18...♘d6!

Switching the knight to f5 disrupts White's build-up and in particular prevents White from creating threats on the long diagonal; for example, 19 ♗f4 ♘f5 20 ♕d2 ♗a6 gives Black reasonable counterplay. Therefore if White is still hoping for an advantage, he is more or less forced to take the offered pawn, but this opens up the long diagonal pointing at White's own kingside, which was weakened by the unwise exchange on move 17.

19 ♕xd5 ♗b7 20 ♕g5

After 20 ♕b3 Black continues 20...♘f5 21 ♗c5 ♕e4 22 f3 ♕xe2 23 ♕xb7 ♖ab8 24 ♕c7 ♕xb2 with a near-certain draw.

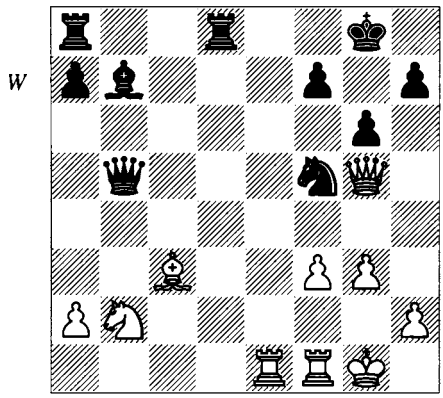
20...♕e4 21 f3 ♕e6 22 ♗d4?

White at last gets his bishop to the long diagonal, but he is given no chance to enjoy his success. 22 ♖fe1! is best, defending the important e-pawn, when he still has a small advantage.

22...♘f5 23 ♗c3 ♕xe2 24 ♖ce1

Or 24 ♕f6 ♕e3+ 25 ♖f2 (25 ♔g2? loses to 25...♖d2+) 25...♘d4 26 ♗xd4 ♕xd4 27 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 and Black has some advantage.

24...♕b5



25 ♔g2?

25 ♕f6? ♕b6+ 26 ♕xb6 axb6 27 ♘c4 ♗a6 also favours Black, so the tricky 25 ♘a4! is best, when 25...♕xa4 26 ♕f6 ♖d4 27 ♖d1 is equal.

25...♖d6!

Ruling out ♕f6. White's badly-placed knight and exposed king give Black a clear advantage.

26 g4 ♖c8 27 ♘d1 ♖xd1?

The wrong moment for this move. 27...h6! 28 ♕f4 ♖xd1! 29 gxf5 (29 ♖xd1 ♕e2+ 30 ♔h3 ♘e3 and Black wins) 29...♖xe1 30 ♗xe1 g5 31 ♕b4 ♕d5 is winning for Black, since White's king is exposed, his pawn-structure is shattered and above all Black has crushing pressure on the long diagonal.

28 ♖xd1 ♖xc3?

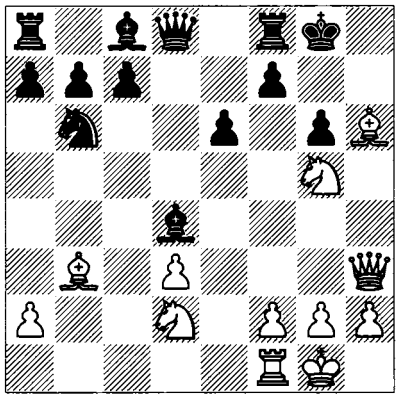
28...♗xf3+ 29 ♖xf3 ♕e2+ 30 ♖f2 ♕xd1 gives Black slight winning chances.

29 gxf5?

29 ♖d8+ ♔g7 30 gxf5 ♖c2+ 31 ♖f2 ♗xf3+ 32 ♔g3! favours White.

29...♗xf3+! 30 ♖xf3 ♕e2+ 31 ♖f2 ♕xd1 32 fxg6?! hxg6 33 ♕f4 ♕d5+ 34 ♔g1 ♖c4 35 ♖d2? ♕c5+ 36 ♕f2 ♖c1+ 37 ♔g2 ♕g5+ 38 ♔f3 ♖c3+ 39 ♔e4 ♕g4+ 40 ♔e5 ♕e6+ 0-1

55 Marginal Sacrifices



Nisipeanu – Reinderman
European Ch, Rijeka 2010

White has sacrificed an exchange and a pawn, but it isn't at all clear whether his compensation is sufficient. In such cases a small slip from either side can easily tip the balance.

17 ♘de4!

By defending f6 White threatens 18 ♗g7!. Keeping the opponent off-balance with direct threats is an important part of almost any attack.

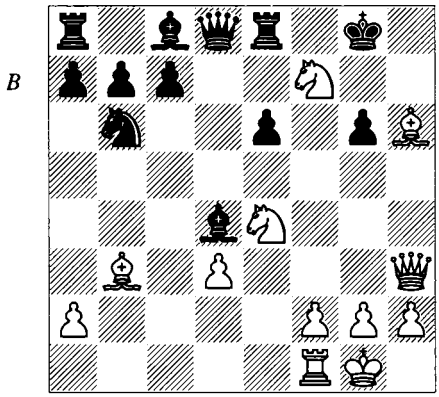
17...♖e8 18 ♘xf7?

In such a complicated position, it is sometimes better to combine analysis with general arguments. Black's main defensive piece is his d4-bishop, and the key square is f6. If White could seize control of f6 and plant a bishop or knight there, then Black would collapse. This immediately suggests 18 ♘h7! (threatening 19 ♗g5) and analysis shows that it wins by force:

1) 18...♘d5 19 ♗g5 f6 20 ♕h6 fxg5 21 ♗xd5 ♖e7 (21...exd5 loses to 22 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 23 ♘hf6 ♗xf6 24 ♘xf6) 22 ♕xg6+ ♖g7 23 ♘ef6+ ♗xf6 24 ♘xf6+ ♔f8 25 ♕h6 ♔f7 26 ♘h5 ♕f8 27 f4 g4 28 f5 exd5 29 f6 ♖g6 30 ♕h7+ ♔e6 31 ♕xg6 and Black is wiped out.

2) 18...f6 19 ♗e3! (19 ♗c1? ♕e7 defends) 19...♔f7 (19...♗xe3 20 ♘hxf6+) 20 ♘eg5+ fxg5 21 ♘xg5+ ♔f8 22 ♕h6+ ♗g7 23 ♗c5+ ♖e7 24 ♕xg6 and again White wins.

3) 18...♘d7 19 ♗g5 f6 20 ♕h6 (penetrating to h6 with the queen is another important idea) 20...fxg5 21 ♕xg6+ ♗g7 (21...♔h8 loses to 22 ♘hxg5) 22 f4! (White's threats paralyse Black, so the relatively slow advance of the f-pawn is decisive) 22...♕e7 (22...g4 23 f5 also wins for White) 23 fxg5 ♖f8 24 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 25 ♘xf8 ♘xf8 26 ♕h5+ ♘h7 27 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 28 g6 followed by ♖f7 ends the game.



The move played is spectacular, but should only lead to an unclear position.

18...♕d7?

Defence is generally more difficult than attack and it often happens that the defender fails to find the saving line. After 18...♔xf7 19 ♕f3+ ♔g8! (19...♗f6? 20 ♖e1 is very good for White after 20...♘d5 21 ♘g5+ ♔g8 22 ♕e4 ♘f4 23 ♕xf4 ♗xg5 24 ♗xg5 ♕xd3 25 ♗f6 or 20...♕d4 21 g4 ♖h8 22 ♗g5 ♘d7 23 ♗d2!) 20 ♕g3 ♔f7 21 ♕f4+ ♗f6 (21...♔g8 22 ♕g4 ♔f7 23 ♘g5+ ♔g8 24 ♘f3 is also murky) 22 ♖e1 ♕d4 White has enough compensation for the rook, but possibly no more than that.

19 ♗e3!

The attack on the d4-bishop prevents Black from playing ...♕xf7.

19...♔xf7

19...♗g7 20 ♘eg5 and 19...♖e7 20 ♘c5! ♗xc5 21 ♕h8+ ♔xf7 22 ♗h6 are decisive.

20 ♕h7+ ♗g7 21 ♘g5+ ♔f6 22 ♘e4+ ♔f7 23 ♘g5+ ♔f6 24 ♘f3!

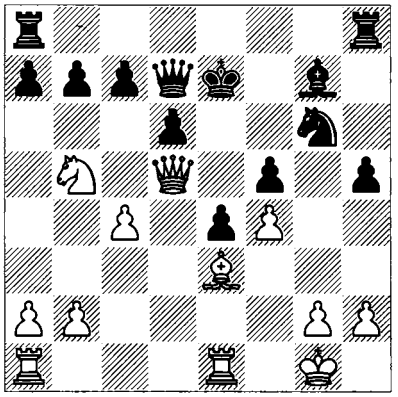
The key idea. There's no real defence to the threat of 25 ♗g5+ ♔f7 26 ♘e5+.

24...♕d6 25 ♗g5+ ♔f7 26 ♗h6 ♕f8

26...♖g8 loses to 27 ♘g5+ ♔f8 28 ♕xg6.

27 ♘e5+ ♔f6 28 ♕xg6+ ♔e7 29 ♗xg7 ♕f5 30 ♕h6 ♘d5 31 g4 1-0

W



Sutovsky – Kramnik
Dortmund 2005

White has sacrificed a pawn to keep Black's king in the centre and now he has to decide how to continue the attack.

22 c5?!

White decides to offer a piece to open lines. Objectively, this probably isn't a good idea since the simple 22 ♖ad1! gives White good play without any further material investment. However, the game continuation provides an object lesson as to how even very strong players can be overwhelmed by the demands of a difficult defence.

22...c6 23 cxd6+

23 ♕xd6+ ♕xd6 24 ♘xd6 ♔e6 is only equal.

23...♔f8 24 ♕b3 cxb5 25 ♖ac1

This is the idea. For the moment, Black's king is trapped in an awkward position and White has the immediate threat of 26 ♖c7.

25...♕f7

Forced, clearing a possible escape-route via g8 and h7. 25...♕xd6? loses at once to 26 ♖ed1 ♕f6 27 ♖c7 with overwhelming threats.

26 ♕xb5 a6?!

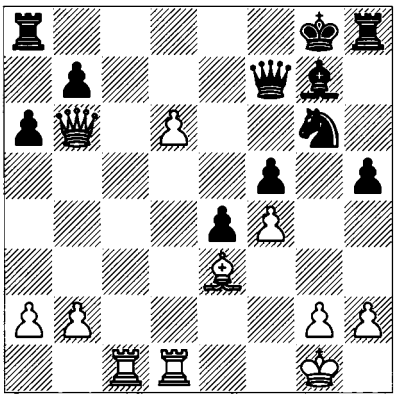
Black loses this game because he makes a common defensive mistake. Kramnik decides that he has to get his king to h7 at all costs, but this wastes time without greatly improving Black's position. Instead he should have tried to activate his pieces, waiting to see what White does before deciding whether to run with his king. Flexibility is a key element of defence and it's important not to focus on one particular aim to the exclusion of all other factors. 26...♖d8! 27 ♖c7 ♕e6 28 ♕xb7 ♗f6 29 ♖d1 ♖g8 is a sounder plan of defence. In this line Black hasn't improved his king position, but his flexible response has prepared ...♖g7 or possible counterplay by ...♘h4. In this case Black is at least equal.

27 ♕b6 ♔g8

27...♗f6 28 ♖c7 ♕e6 29 ♖ec1 ♖d8 is also roughly level.

28 ♖ed1

B



28...♔h7?

Black follows his plan, but now falls into a lost position. He could still hold the game by 28...♗f6! 29 ♖c7 ♕e6 30 ♕xb7 ♖d8; for example, 31 d7 ♘f8 32 ♖c6 ♖xd7 33 ♖xd7 ♕xd7 34 ♕b3+ ♔g7 35 ♖xf6 ♔xf6 36 ♕c3+ ♔f7 37 ♕xh8 ♕d1+ 38 ♔f2 ♕c2+ with perpetual check.

29 ♖c7 ♕f8 30 ♗d4 ♖g8 31 ♕xb7

Threatening, amongst other things, 32 ♖f7.

31...e3

Or 31...♖b8 32 ♗xg7 ♖xb7 33 ♗xf8+ ♖xc7 34 dxc7 ♖xf8 35 ♖d8 and White wins.

32 ♖f7!

Not 32 ♗xg7? ♖xg7 33 ♖xg7+? ♕xg7 34 ♕xa8 e2 35 ♖e1 ♕d4+ 36 ♔h1 ♕f2, when Black wins.

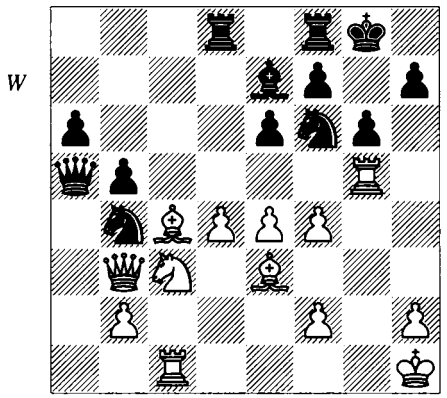
32...♖b8 33 ♕d7 ♖d8 34 ♕xf5 ♕xf7 35 ♕xf7 ♖xd6 36 ♔f1

Holding up the e-pawn. 36 f5 is quicker, but the line played is also sufficient to win.

36...♘xf4 37 ♕f5+ ♖g6 38 ♕xf4 ♖f8 39 ♕xf8 ♗xf8 40 ♗xe3 ♖e6 41 ♔f2 ♔g6 42 ♖d5 ♗e7 43 ♗c5 ♗f6 44 b3 ♗e5 45 g3 h4 46 gxh4 ♗xh2 47 h5+ ♔h7 48 ♔f3 ♗e5 49 ♖d7+ ♔h6 50 ♔g4 ♗g7 51 ♖d6 1-0

56 Breakthrough to the King

Breaking through to the enemy king may require a series of sacrifices and a good deal of courage. It's certainly wrong to indulge in sacrifices that are patently unsound, but in marginal cases the attack often succeeds even when objectively it is not quite correct.



Rapport – Rogić
Austrian Team Ch 2010/11

18 ♗xe6! fxe6 19 f5!?

This shows that White has the spirit of an attacker. After 19 ♕xe6+ ♖f7 20 f5 ♖d6 21 ♕b3 he has good positional compensation for the piece, but he prefers to roll the dice.

19...♘fd5! 20 exd5 exd5?

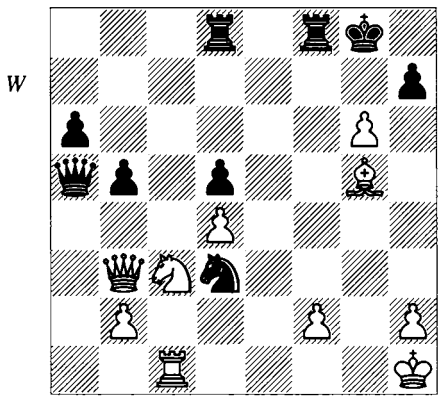
In such a complex position, it's easy to go wrong. 20...♗xg5?! 21 ♗xg5 ♘d3 is the second-best defence, and after 22 dxe6 ♘xc1 23 ♗xc1 ♖de8 24 e7+ ♖f7 25 ♗g5 ♕a1+ 26 ♔g2 ♕e1 27 ♕e6 ♕xe6 28 fxe6 ♖fxe7 29 ♗xe7 ♖xe7 30 d5 ♔f8 31 ♔f3 b4 the most likely result is a draw. Paradoxically, the best move is 20...♘d3!, when Black retains an edge in all lines; for example, 21 ♖f1 (21 dxe6 ♘xc1 22 ♗xc1 ♔g7 favours Black) 21...♗xg5 22 ♗xg5 ♖xf5 23 dxe6 ♔g7 24 f4 ♕b6 25 ♗xd8 ♕xd8 and although White is temporarily a pawn up, Black's pieces are actively placed and it is now White's king which looks the more exposed. This is a tough defence to find, because when there are various pieces available to capture, one does not immediately think of a non-capturing move.

21 fxg6

White's attack is very dangerous, especially as Black's queen and knight are far out of play.

21...♗xg5 22 ♗xg5 ♘d3

22...hxg6 23 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 24 ♖g1 ♔g7 (after 24...♖d6 White wins by 25 ♘e4! ♖c6 26 ♘g5) 25 ♘e2 threatening 26 ♘f4 or 26 ♕e3 gives White a decisive advantage.



23 ♘xd5!

Once given his chance, White conducts the attack with great energy.

23...♘xc1 24 ♘e7++ ♔g7 25 ♕e6

Threatening 26 ♕e5+ and mate next move.

25...b4?!

25...♕c7 is the toughest defence, but after 26 ♕h3! h5 27 ♕e3 (threatening 28 ♗h6+) 27...♘d3 28 ♗h6+ ♔f6 29 ♗xf8 ♕b7+ 30 d5 ♖xf8 31 ♕d4+ ♔g5 32 g7 ♕xe7 33 gxf8♕ ♕xf8 34 ♕xd3 ♕f5 (34...♕xf2 loses to 35 d6) 35 ♕d4 ♕f6 36 ♕d2+ ♔f5 37 f4 White should win the queen ending.

26 d5!

Again threatening ♕e5+ and this time there is no adequate defence.

26...♘d3

Or 26...♕c7 27 ♕h3 h5 28 ♕e3 with the decisive threats of ♗h6+ and ♕d4+.

27 ♗h6+! ♔xh6 28 gxh7+ ♔g5

Or 28...♔g7 29 h8♕+! ♖xh8 (29...♔xh8 30 ♕h6#) 30 ♘f5+ ♔f8 31 ♕e7+ ♔g8 32 ♕g7#.

29 ♕g6+ 1-0

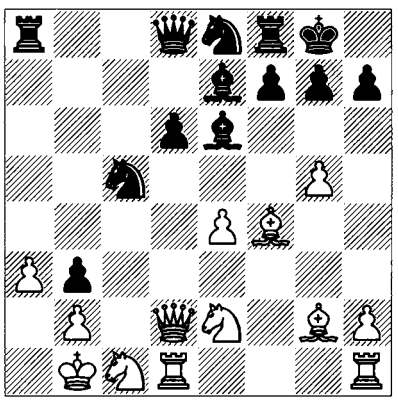
It's mate after 29...♔f4 30 ♕g3+ ♔e4 31 ♕e3# or 29...♔h4 30 h8♕+ ♖xh8 31 ♘f5+ ♔h3 32 ♕g3#.

Svidler – Vallejo Pons
Amber Rapid, Monte Carlo 2004

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 f3 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e6 8 ♗e3 ♗e7 9 ♕d2 0-0 10 0-0-0 ♘bd7 11 g4 b5 12 g5 b4 13 ♘e2 ♘e8 14 ♔b1?! a5 15 ♘bc1 a4 16 f4 exf4 17 ♗xf4 ♘c5 18 ♗g2

Black's queenside pawns are far-advanced, but it's not easy to make progress with his attack because some of his pieces are poorly placed to take aim at White's queenside.

18...b3 19 cxb3 axb3 20 a3



If White can consolidate his position, then he may be able to prove that Black has overextended himself on the queenside. Therefore it is important for Black to keep up the momentum of his attack and in particular to bring inactive pieces such as the e8-knight into play.

20...d5!?

As in the previous example, there comes a moment when a brave decision is necessary to advance the attack. 20...♕d7 is roughly level, but Black sharpens the struggle by offering a pawn to get the e8-knight into active play.

21 ♘d4 ♘d6 22 exd5

Black is committed to his attack, since he has not only surrendered a pawn but also given White's knight an outpost on c6.

22...♗g4 23 ♖de1?

23 ♘c6?! ♕d7 24 ♖de1? is tempting, but fails to 24...♗xg5! 25 ♗xg5 ♗f5+ 26 ♔a1 ♘c4 27 ♕d4 ♖xa3+ 28 bxa3 b2+ 29 ♕xb2 ♘xb2 30 ♔xb2 ♕b7+ with a winning position for Black. In this position, time is more important than material and White should not have spent a tempo saving his rook. 23 ♕b4! was correct, seizing the initiative himself, and then Black would be fighting for equality.

23...♕d7?!

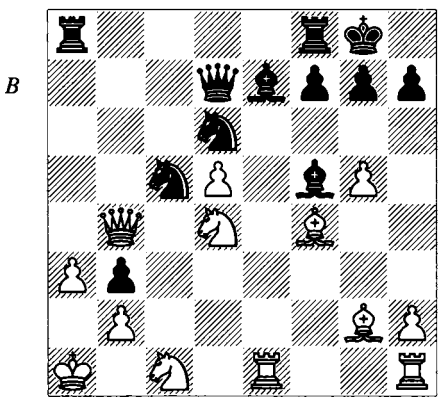
Black could have secured an advantage with the difficult line 23...♘c4! 24 ♕c3 ♖xa3 25 bxa3 (25 ♕xc4 ♖a4 26 ♕xa4 ♘xa4 27 ♘c6 ♕b6 28 ♘xe7+ ♔h8 favours Black) 25...♘xa3+ 26 ♔a1 ♕b6! 27 ♘cxb3 (27 ♖xe7 ♖a8! is decisive, while 27 ♘dxb3 ♗f5! 28 d6 ♗f6! 29 gxf6 ♘c2+ 30 ♔b1 ♘xe1+ 31 ♔a2 ♘xb3 32 ♘xb3 ♘xg2 regains the sacrificed material and leaves White's king hopelessly exposed) 27...♘xb3+ 28 ♘xb3 ♗b4! 29 ♕d3 (29 ♕c7 ♕a6 30 ♕c6 ♕a7 32 ♔b2 ♘b5! is also a win for Black) 29...♘b5! and Black's threats are too strong.

24 ♕b4?

This error allows Black to break through with a cascade of sacrifices. There were two reasonable lines: 24 ♕c3 ♗f5+ 25 ♔a1 ♘de4 26 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 27 ♘c6 ♖fe8 28 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 29 ♘xb3 ♘a4 and 24 ♖xe7 ♕xe7 25 ♕b4 ♘de4 26 ♘cxb3 ♖a4 27 ♕b5 ♕e8 28 ♘xc5 ♕xb5 29 ♘xb5 ♘xc5, both of which are unclear.

24...♗f5+ 25 ♔a1

25 ♘xf5 ♕xf5+ 26 ♔a1 ♖fb8 27 ♕xc5 ♘c4 28 ♕xe7 ♕c2 29 ♖e2 ♘xa3 leads to mate.



25...♖fb8! 26 ♕xc5 ♘c4 27 d6

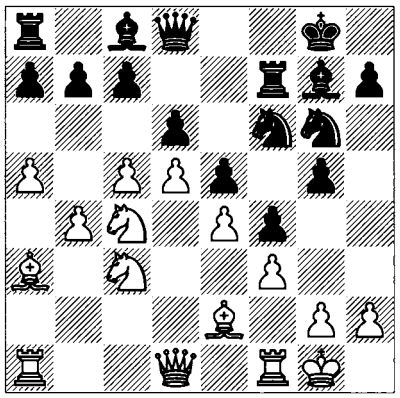
Both 27 ♖xe7 ♘xa3 28 ♘dxb3 ♘c4+ 29 ♘a2 ♖xa2+ 30 ♔xa2 ♕a4+ and 27 ♕xc4 ♖xa3+ 28 bxa3 b2+ win for Black.

27...♖xa3+! 28 ♕xa3 ♘xa3 29 dxe7 ♘c2+ 30 ♘xc2 ♕a4+ 0-1

31 ♘a3 ♕xa3+ 32 bxa3 b2+ 33 ♔a2 b1♕#.

57 The All-Out Attack

Sometimes a player commits himself totally to an attack, making so many concessions (materially and/or positionally) that the attack **must** succeed or he is doomed. Such attacks, which we call **all-out attacks**, require an absolutely iron will, since an initial material investment may need to be followed up by further sacrifices. However, the rewards can be great. Even if the attack is not objectively sufficient for victory, the prolonged pressure on the defender can make even very strong players falter.



Beliavsky – Nakamura
Amsterdam 2009

16...h5 17 b5 dxc5!?

The same interesting strategy as in Gelfand-Nakamura (page 189); Black makes the positional concession of breaking up his pawn-chain in order to gain time for the kingside attack.

18 b6 g4 19 bxc7!

Beliavsky improves on 19 ♗xc5, transposing to Gelfand-Nakamura.

19...♖xc7 20 ♘b5

Now 20...♖f7 21 ♘bd6 is very good for White, so Black decides to go for an all-out attack. Objectively speaking, White retains an advantage, but even a strong grandmaster such as Beliavsky has trouble finding his way through the complications.

20...g3 21 ♘xc7 ♘xe4!

That's what I mean by an all-out attack! Black is willing to invest a lot of material to smash through to the white king.

22 ♘e6?

After this Black has at least a draw, but it wasn't easy to choose the best line from many options. 22 fxe4! is correct; then the main line runs 22...♕h4 23 h3 ♗xh3 24 gxh3 ♕xh3 25 ♖f2! gxf2+ 26 ♔xf2 ♕g3+ 27 ♔f1 ♕h3+ 28 ♔e1 ♕c3+ 29 ♕d2 ♕xa1+ 30 ♗d1 ♖b8 31 d6, when White is certainly better, although the position remains complicated. This line shows that countering an all-out attack may involve the return of the sacrificed material.

22...♗xe6 23 dxe6 gxh2+ 24 ♔xh2 ♕h4+ 25 ♔g1 ♘g3

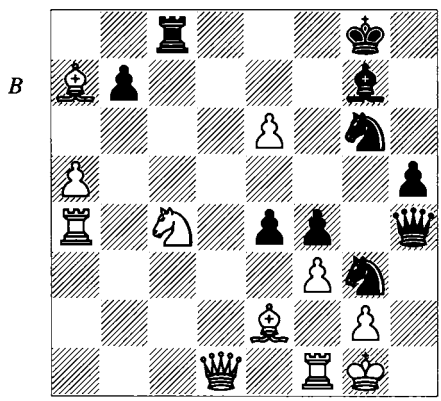
Threatening to win by 26...e4, followed by either ...e3 or ...♗d4+.

26 ♗xc5 e4 27 ♖a4

An ingenious and perfectly adequate defence, preventing 27...e3 due to 28 ♘xe3.

27...♖c8 28 ♗xa7?

After Black's astonishing reply White is lost. The best line is 28 e7! ♘xe7 29 ♘d6 exf3 30 ♗c4+ ♔h8 31 ♘f7+ ♔g8 (31...♔h7 32 ♕xf3 ♖xc5 33 ♗d3+ is even slightly better for White) 32 ♘e5+ ♔h8 33 ♘f7+, drawing by repetition.



28...b5!!

A problem-like move which forks the rook and knight, and 29 axb6?? allows mate after 29...♗d4+ 30 ♕xd4 ♘xe2#.

29 ♖b4

There is no defence as 29 ♖a3 bxc4 30 fxe4 ♖d8 31 ♕c2 c3! gives Black a decisive attack.

29...bxc4 30 ♗xc4 ♕h1+ 31 ♔f2 e3+ 32 ♗xe3 fxe3+ 33 ♔xe3 ♘xf1+ 34 ♗xf1 ♕g1+ 0-1

Sometimes the all-out attack starts right in the opening.

Motyliov – Radjabov
Khanty-Mansiisk Olympiad 2010

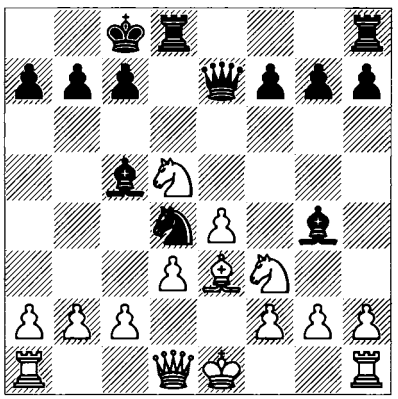
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗b5 ♘d4 5 ♗c4 ♗c5

The most vigorous continuation, offering a pawn for a lasting initiative.

6 ♘xe5 ♕e7 7 ♘f3 d5

Once you have started down the sacrificial route, it's often necessary to invest further material to keep the momentum going. Here Black offers a second pawn to speed his development and pin the f3-knight.

8 ♗xd5 ♗g4 9 d3 0-0-0 10 ♗e3 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5



11...♖xd5!

Black's attack would collapse without this further sacrifice, but the material deficit is growing.

12 exd5 ♖e8 13 0-0?!

Playing for the advantage, but this is risky. 13 c3 is safer and leads to a forced draw after 13...♘xf3+ 14 gxf3 ♕h4 15 ♔d2 ♖xe3! 16 fxe3 ♕f2+ 17 ♔c1 ♗xf3 18 ♕e1 ♗xe3+ 19 ♔b1 ♗xh1 20 ♕xh1 ♕e2! 21 a4 ♕xd3+ 22 ♔a2 ♕c4+ 23 ♔b1 ♕d3+, as in Vallejo Pons-L.Dominguez, Cuernavaca 2006.

13...♗xf3

After 13...♘xf3+?! 14 gxf3 ♗h3 15 ♔h1 ♗xf1 16 ♕xf1 ♗xe3 17 ♖e1 White can retain an edge.

14 gxf3 ♗d6

Threatening to win by 15...♕h4 16 f4 ♕h3, so White now blocks the b8-h2 diagonal.

15 f4 ♕h4

Black's attack is at least sufficient for a draw; moreover, the pressure is on White to find the correct defensive move time after time.

16 ♔h1 ♕h3 17 ♖g1

The only way to meet the threat of ...♘f3.

17...♘f3 18 ♖g2 g5

The next wave of the attack arrives; the threat is simply 19...gxf4.

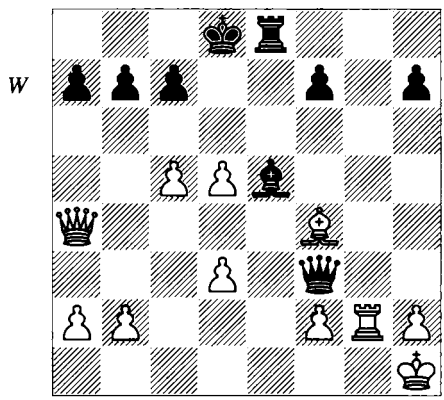
19 c4

19 c3? ♖g8! followed by ...♖g6 is very good for Black.

19...gxf4 20 ♕a4 ♔d8?!

Black can secure a slight advantage by 20...c6 21 dxc6 fxe3 22 cxb7+ ♔d8 23 c5 (23 ♕c6? loses to 23...♔e7) 23...♗xh2 24 ♕g4 ♕xg4 25 ♖xg4 e2 26 ♔g2 e1♕ 27 ♖xe1 ♘xe1+ 28 ♔xh2 ♔c7 29 d4 ♔xb7, although a draw is likely.

21 c5 ♘h4 22 ♖ag1 ♗e5 23 ♗xf4 ♘xg2 24 ♖xg2 ♕f3



25 ♗xe5?

The relentless pressure finally takes its toll. White could have preserved the balance by 25 ♗g3!, when 25...♗xg3 26 hxg3 ♕xd5 27 ♕c4 ♕f3 28 ♕f4 leads to an equal ending.

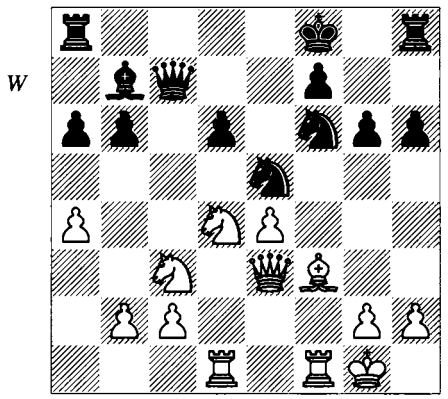
25...♖xe5

There's no satisfactory answer to the double threat of 26...♖e1# and 26...♖g5.

26 ♕h4+ f6 27 h3 ♖g5 28 ♕e4 ♕xh3+ 29 ♔g1 f5! 30 ♖xg5 fxe4 31 dxe4 ♕h6 32 ♖g8+ ♔e7 33 b4 ♕f4 34 ♖g3 ♔f6 35 ♖e3 ♔e5 36 a3 h5 37 ♔g2 ♕g4+ 38 ♔h1 a6 39 ♔h2 h4 40 a4 ♕d1 41 ♖h3 ♔xe4 42 ♖xh4+ ♔e5 0-1

58 Surprise Moves

Sometimes imagination is necessary to find the right attacking continuation. In cases in which your opponent has an evident vulnerability, but the obvious continuations don't work, it may be worth using some time to explore less conventional possibilities.



Akopian – Vachier-Lagrave
Dresden Olympiad 2008

The undefended f6-knight and the possibility of ♘e6+ are tactical weaknesses, but there's no obvious way to exploit them since 18 ♗e2, for example, is met by 18...♔g7.

18 ♗h5!!

This is a real surprise move. While it's clear that 18...♘xh5?? 19 ♘e6+ and 18...gxh5? 19 ♖xf6 are unplayable, it's less obvious what White intends if Black just defends the f6-knight.

18...♕e7

The other main possibility is 18...♔g7, but then 19 ♗xg6! ♘xg6 (19...♔xg6 20 ♘f5! ♘eg4 21 ♕g3 ♕c5+ 22 ♔h1 ♕e5 23 ♖f4 ♔h7 24 ♖xd6 ♗xe4 25 ♖xf6 ♕xf6 26 ♘e3 also gives White a large advantage) 20 ♘f5+ ♔g8 21 ♘xd6 ♘g4 22 ♕g3 h5 23 ♖xf7 ♕c5+ 24 ♔h1 ♗c6 25 ♖f5 ♕e3 26 ♖f3 ♕c5 27 ♘f5 leaves White with three pawns and a continuing attack for the piece.

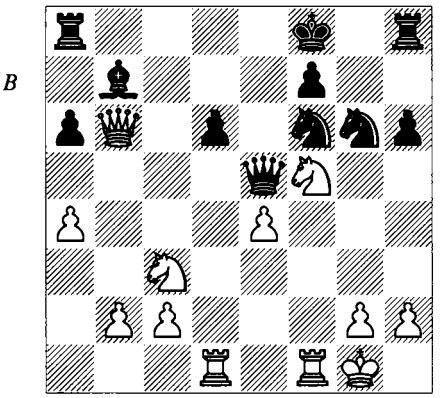
19 ♗xg6!

As in the previous note, the reason the bishop went to h5 is to smash open Black's kingside with a piece sacrifice.

19...♘xg6

19...fxg6 20 ♖xf6+ ♕xf6 21 ♖f1 ♕xf1+ 22 ♔xf1 may be equal on material, but Black's exposed king and weak pawns (especially the one on b6) give White a substantial advantage.

20 ♘f5 ♕e5 21 ♕xb6



In return for the piece, White has two pawns, a superbly-placed knight on f5 and a strong initiative. In addition it's not easy to see how Black can solve the problem of his poor king position and out-of-play rook on h8.

21...♗xe4?

This loses in surprising fashion. 21...♕c5+? 22 ♕xc5 dxc5 23 ♘d6 and 21...♗c8? 22 ♕d8+ ♘e8 23 ♘xd6 ♖h7 24 ♘xe8 ♕xe8 25 ♕d6+ ♔g8 26 ♘d5 are also hopeless for Black, but he can struggle on by 21...♘g4. However, even in this case 22 g3 (22 ♘g3 ♕c5+ 23 ♕xc5 dxc5 24 ♖d7 ♗c8 25 ♖dxf7+ ♔g8 26 ♖c7 ♖h7 27 ♖xc5 also favours White) 22...♕c5+ 23 ♕xc5 dxc5 24 ♘d6 ♘6e5 25 ♘xb7 ♘e3 26 ♘xc5 ♘xd1 27 ♖xd1 gives White a clear advantage since he has three pawns for the exchange.

22 ♕xd6+!

Unexpectedly, the way to press home the attack is to exchange queens.

22...♕xd6 23 ♘xd6 ♗xc2

Forced, as both e4 and f6 are attacked.

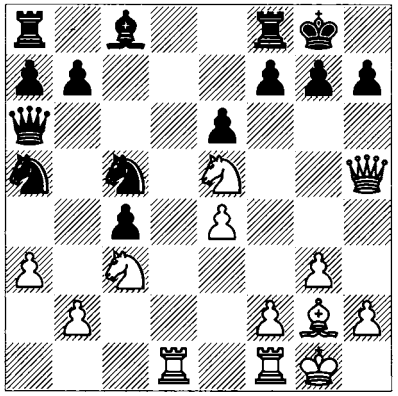
24 ♖xf6! ♖a7

24...♗xd1 25 ♖xf7+ ♔g8 26 ♘d5 leads to mate, so White keeps his material.

25 ♖d2 ♔g7 26 ♖f3 1-0

After 26...♗b3 27 ♘f5+ ♔h7 28 ♘e4 White attacks b3 and threatens mate on f6.

B



Korobov – Vocaturo
Moscow 2011

White has sacrificed a pawn to gain attacking chances against Black's poorly-defended kingside. Although Black's pieces are out of play on the queenside, he has the possibility of ...♘d3 to block the d-file and thus permit the development of his queenside by ...♗d7. Since 17...♘d3 18 ♘xd3 cxd3 19 e5 followed by ♗e4 favours White, Vocaturo decides first to shift the e5-knight.

17...f6?

Now it looks as though White must move the knight, but after 18 ♘g6 hxg6 19 ♕xc5 b6 or 18 ♘g4 ♘d3 Black has nothing to fear. It's in situations such as this that imagination plays a key role, with some players putting in the extra effort to search for a tactical idea even when there is nothing obvious. One shouldn't waste time looking for tactics in positions where there is no chance of success, but here, with two white pieces hovering near the enemy king and all Black's men except for the f8-rook far away on the queenside, there's some reason to hope for a surprise.

17...♕b6, covering d8 and attacking b2, is correct, with an unclear position.

18 ♖d8!!

And here's the surprise. Instead of moving the knight, White puts a rook *en prise* as well, securing a strong attack however Black replies.

18...fxe5

Not 18...♖xd8? 19 ♕f7+ ♔h8 20 ♕e7 regaining the rook with a winning attack; for example, after 20...♗d7 21 ♘f7+ ♔g8 22 ♘xd8 h6 23 e5! f5 24 ♖d1 White has overwhelming threats.

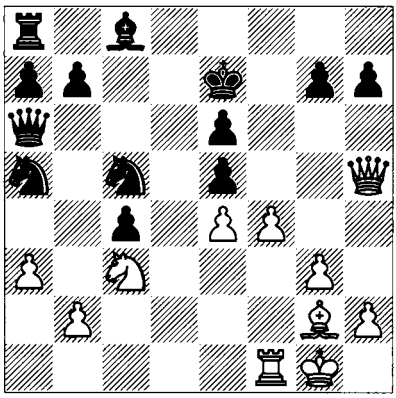
19 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 20 f4

The key point. White opens the f-file and brings his rook into the attack.

20...♔e7

20...♘d7? loses to 21 fxe5+ ♔e7 22 ♘d5+! exd5 23 exd5 ♕h6 24 d6+ ♔d8 25 ♕f7 ♕e3+ 26 ♔h1 ♕xe5 27 ♕g8+ ♕e8 28 ♕xg7.

W



21 fxe5?

A shame. White misses 21 ♕xe5! ♘d3 (or 21...♔e8 22 ♕xg7 ♕b6 23 ♔h1 ♘d3 24 h3 followed by f5 and again White wins) 22 ♕xg7+ ♔d8 23 ♔h1 ♕b6 24 h3 followed by f5 with a large advantage for White.

21...♔d8 22 ♕g5+ ♔c7 23 ♕e7+ ♘d7 24 ♔h1

The position is now approximately level, but White's persistent pressure eventually induced a mistake by Black.

24...♔b8 25 ♗h3 ♕c6

25...♕b6 26 ♗xe6 ♘c6 27 ♕d6+ ♕c7 28 ♘d5 ♕xd6 29 exd6 ♘c5 30 ♗xc8 ♔xc8 31 ♖f7 ♖b8 32 e5 ♘e6 is also equal.

26 ♗xe6 a6 27 ♖f7 ♘b6 28 ♗d5 ♘xd5?

28...♕h6! maintains the balance.

29 exd5 ♕b6 30 e6 ♔a7 31 ♕b4! ♕xb4 32 axb4 ♘b3 33 ♖xg7?!

33 ♘e4! is very strong, but the move played also proved sufficient in the end:

33...♘d4 34 ♖xh7 ♘xe6 35 dxe6 ♗xe6 36 ♔g1 ♖d8 37 ♖e7 ♗h3 38 ♔f2 ♖d6 39 ♖e4 ♖d2+ 40 ♔e2 ♖d6 41 ♔e3 ♖e6+ 42 ♔f4 ♖f6+ 43 ♔e5 ♖e6+ 44 ♔d4 ♖d6+ 45 ♘d5 ♗e6 46 ♖e5 b6 47 h4 ♔b7 48 ♔e4 ♔c6 49 ♘f4 ♗g4 50 ♖d5 ♖f6 51 h5 b5 52 ♖g5 ♗d1 53 ♖g6 ♗c2+ 54 ♔e5 ♖xg6 55 hxg6 1-0

Defensive Play

Published games are often brilliancies in which the attacker smashes through with a spectacular sacrifice and forces mate, thus creating the impression that the odds heavily favour the attacker. There is a grain of truth in this since it is normally easier to attack than to defend. The attacker only needs to find one way through, whereas the defender generally has to take into account various attacking ideas by his opponent. But that is not to say the attacker can play without risk; indeed, most attacks involve an element of risk. This can take the form of a material investment, or the risk can be positional in nature. If the attack depends on playing one's queen to h4 and rook to h3, then these pieces may be seriously misplaced if the attack fails. Many attacks involve pawn advances, which leave weaknesses behind them. If the attack succeeds then these weaknesses will be irrelevant, but if the defender can fend off the attack, the weaknesses may become the dominant factors.

Danielsen-Nielsen (page 148) is a good illustration of these ideas. White is committed to an attack due to his trapped bishop and has to be prepared to offer more material should the need arise. However, the range of alternative attacking ideas evidently confused White because, although objectively his attack was good enough for at least equality, he chose a tempting but unsound continuation which allowed Black to grab the material on offer and run with his king. It's quite common for the attacker to lose his bearings in cases where there is no obvious way for the attack to break through. Lecuyer-Manouck (page 149) is an example of positional risk. White played ♖f3-h3 and ♕h5 to threaten a catastrophe on h7, but when Black met this by playing a knight to f8, White was thrown into confusion. His attack was no longer viable, so he had to switch to positional play, but chose the wrong way to do this, with the result that Black was able to complete his development and acquire a strong kingside initiative himself. These examples should give the defender confidence that if the attack can be repulsed, the defender often gains an automatic advantage.

One of the standard methods of fending off an attack is to exchange the attacker's most dangerous pieces. Many attacks collapse without their key players, and in Külaots-G.Hernandez (page 150) Black first of all removes the powerful d5-knight and then forces an exchange of queens. This defuses what could have been a very dangerous situation and steers the game safely towards a drawish ending. Such liquidations often depend on tactical points, and it's important for the defender to remain alert for tactical opportunities which can be exploited to take the sting out of an attack. One naturally thinks of the attacker as being the main source of tactics, but it's surprising how often the defender can exploit a factor such as a weak back rank to counter the threats. Vitiugov-Ni Hua (page 151) is a good example of such a turnaround. White's attack looked very dangerous, but a surprising tactic involving a temporary queen sacrifice allowed Black to liquidate into an ending in which his material advantage eventually proved decisive.

One of the traditional rules for defending against an attack on the king is that you should not create weaknesses on the side where you are being attacked. This rule is justified most of the time. Moving a pawn forward in front of the king creates weak squares and may make it easier for the attacker to open a file, so in general pawns in front of the king should only be touched when there is no choice. Smirnov-Romanov (page 152) is a good example of careful defence. Black's only pawn move on the kingside was the simple ...f6, which prevented f6 by White and allowed Black's rooks to defend along the second rank. The remaining squares on the kingside were covered by Black's knights from e8 and f8. This solid set-up made it impossible for White to break through using only his pieces, so to make inroads he had to advance his pawns, but this took time and created weaknesses. Black's counterplay on the queenside broke through before White had made any serious threats on the kingside and the game quickly turned in Black's favour. One of the few exceptions to this rule may occur during the early stages of an attack, when a pre-emptive strike by the defender can sometimes nullify the attack before it has even got started. Hou Yifan-Kosteniuk (page 153)

demonstrates this idea to perfection, since Black's ...h5 caused a complete reversal of fortunes on the kingside, and soon it was Black rather than White who was attacking there.

Just as tactics are not the sole preserve of the attacker, the same goes for sacrifices. The attacker often has to make serious positional concessions in order to conduct his attack, and if the defender can nullify the attack at the cost of a modest amount of material, then he may be able to exploit the weaknesses in the attacker's position. Illescas-Andersson (page 154) is a good example. Black bought off the attack at the cost of a pawn by the simple expedient of running away with his king. It turned out that White's misplaced pieces, coupled with Black's two bishops, provided plenty of compensation for the pawn and Black quickly seized the initiative. If the attacker has already sacrificed material, then the defender has even more opportunities for counter-sacrificing. In Miladinović-Lajthajm (page 155), White had already given up two pawns when we join the game. The attack looks dangerous and at least enough for a draw, but by giving up his queen for a rook and a minor piece, Black managed to steer the game into an ending where only he had winning chances.

Defence generally requires a clear head and an ability not to become flustered under pressure. In Shirov – Vachier-Lagrave (page 156), Black was faced with a dangerous kingside attack handled by one of the world's best tacticians. However, he defended coolly and found the best moves, eventually inducing a mistake by Shirov which cost him the game. It's interesting to note that even with best play, White's attack was only good enough for a draw. Lupulescu-Nanu (page 157) is even more dramatic. Black lost the right to castle and was in obvious danger, but after a slip by White he played calmly, freeing his king and using tactics to escape from his difficulties. It wasn't long before the game swung in Black's favour.

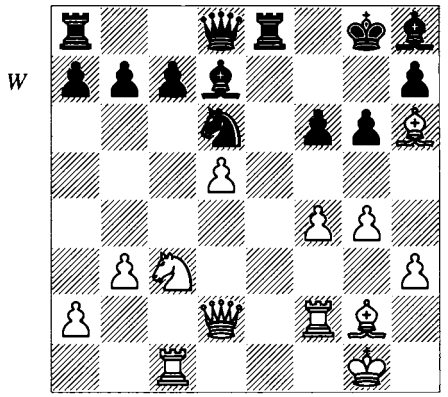
When one's king is under fire on one side of the board, one possible plan is simply to move the king out of the danger area. This is only possible in certain situations (see Illescas-Andersson mentioned above for another example) but can prove very effective. Korchnoi-Sakaev (page 158) shows the veteran grandmaster misjudging his attacking chances. Penetrating with his queen to h7 didn't produce the results White was hoping for, and when Black ran away with his king to e7 it turned out that White had only compromised his position by giving up his dark-squared bishop. Fressinet-Lopez Martinez (page 159) shows an even longer king-march.

Another possibility for the defender is to launch a counter-attack, even while the opponent's attack is still in progress. The plan is to generate enough threats to distract the attacker from his own plans. Such situations of attack and counter-attack are often very double-edged, with a fine line between a win and a loss. In Ivanchuk-Topalov (page 160), White launched a dangerous attack while still in the opening. To begin with, Black was on the defensive and was restricted to fending off White's threats, but when White made a natural but incorrect move, Black was able to exploit the weaknesses created by White's early pawn advances to launch a counter-attack. It's not easy to defend when a few moves ago you were attacking, and Ivanchuk soon made a further error which sealed his fate. Marin-Ljubojević (page 161) is slightly different in that for a long time Black had to focus on countering White's threats, but when White's attack started to lose momentum, Black seized his chance to launch an unexpectedly powerful counter-attack.

As a final defensive tip, I can't do better than the famous catchphrase from Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: DON'T PANIC. Whilst this is good advice for chess in general, it applies especially to two defensive situations. Firstly, when your opponent makes an absolutely unexpected sacrifice, it's essential to keep calm. Try to forget what the situation had been the move before and focus only on the current situation on the board. Can you decline the sacrifice? Is it clearly lost if you accept? In Adianto-Sharavdorj (page 162), a serious mistake by White allowed a shocking sacrifice, but against accurate defence it was only enough for a draw. The upshot was rather chaotic, but in the end White even won the game. The second situation arises when your opponent has what looks like a very strong attack and you have no obvious counterplay. This was the situation in Topalov-Adams (page 163), with White under severe pressure and having no extra material as solace. However, Topalov defended resourcefully and didn't allow Adams an easy win. When Adams slipped up, Topalov jumped at the chance to create queenside counterplay and turn the game around.

59 The Risks of Attacking

Many attacks involve a degree of risk. The attacker has to commit himself, either materially or positionally, in order to launch his attack. If the attack breaks through, all well and good, but the defender can take heart in the knowledge that if he can fend off the threats, the tide will often turn in his favour.



Danielsen – P.H. Nielsen
Danish Ch playoff (2), Copenhagen 1996

White's bishop is trapped on h6, so he is committed to an attack. Thanks to Black's slightly loose king position, White's attack is correct in the sense that it is at least good enough for equality, but it requires accurate play.

24 f5 g5 25 h4 ♘f7 26 hxg5 fxg5 27 f6!

This pawn sacrifice is necessary to open the f-file for White's attack.

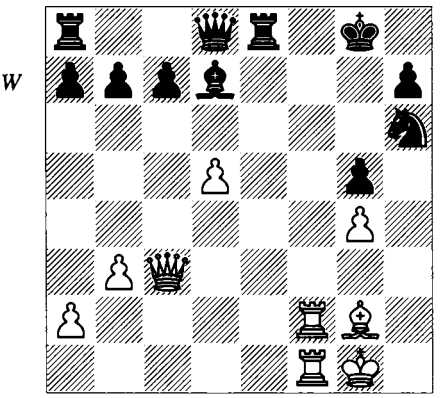
27...♗xf6

Not 27...♘xh6?, after which White wins by 28 ♕xg5+.

28 ♖cf1?

It's easy for White to make a mistake and this tempting move is the wrong way to go about offering the piece. 28 d6 c6 29 ♗d5! is correct and after 29...cxd5 30 ♘xd5 ♖e6 31 ♖cf1 ♗b5 White has the choice between 32 ♖xf6 ♕xd6 33 ♕c3 ♘xh6 34 ♖xe6 ♕xe6 35 ♘f6+ ♔f8 36 ♕c5+ ♔g7 37 ♘h5+ ♔g8 38 ♕xg5+ ♕g6 39 ♕d5+ ♘f7 40 ♘f6+ ♔h8 41 ♕xb5 and 32 ♘xf6+ ♖xf6 33 ♖xf6 ♗xf1 34 ♖f5 ♗b5 35 ♕d5 ♕b6+ 36 ♖f2 ♗e8 37 d7 ♕c6 38 dxe8♕+ ♕xe8 39 ♗xg5, both of which give him a slight advantage. It's curious that in the second of these lines the apparently doomed white bishop on h6 lives to fight another day.

28...♗xc3 29 ♕xc3 ♘xh6



Now White has made an irrevocable material commitment, so his attack has to succeed.

30 ♖f6 ♘xg4!

This looks risky, but the knight is heading for e5 to block the long diagonal. 30...♗b5? is wrong due to 31 d6 c6 32 ♖xh6 ♗xf1?! 33 ♗xf1, winning for White.

31 ♖f7 ♘e5

31...♖e5? is the wrong way to block the diagonal: 32 ♕c2! ♗f5 33 ♖1xf5 ♖e1+ 34 ♗f1 ♘h6 35 ♖f8+ ♕xf8 36 ♖xg5+ ♔f7 37 ♕f2+ ♔e7 38 ♕xe1+ ♔d8 39 ♕e6 and White wins.

32 ♗e4

When an attack starts to falter, the attacker often has to throw further wood on the fire in increasingly desperate attempts to keep it going.

32...♘xf7

Black grabs everything on offer, having calculated that his king can escape.

33 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 34 ♖xf7+ ♔g6 35 ♕g7+ ♔h5

It looks dangerous, but White's lack of kingside pawns enables the black king to run away.

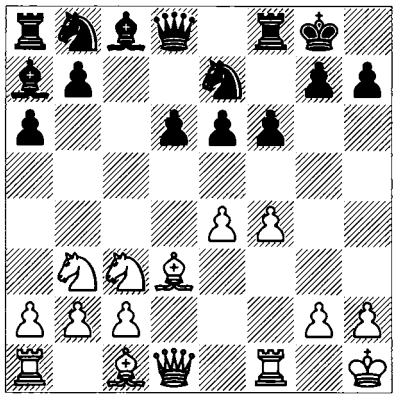
36 ♔f2

36 ♖xd7 ♖e1+ 37 ♔f2 ♕e8 38 ♕h7+ ♔g4 is also winning for Black.

36...♗f5 37 ♕a1

37 ♖xf5 loses to 37...♕e7.

37...♕xd5 0-1



Lecuyer – Manouck
French Ch, Schiltigheim 1982

11 ♖f3!?

Black's rather passive opening encourages White to launch a kingside attack. Although this attack doesn't involve any material investment, it nevertheless entails a degree of risk. White spends three tempi (♖f3, ♖h3 and ♕h5) to attack h7, which not only costs time but also risks leaving the rook and queen misplaced if the attack fails. A solid plan of development such as 11 ♕f3 followed by ♗e3 involves less risk, but White's idea, if followed up correctly, is not bad.

11...♖e8 12 ♖h3 ♘g6 13 ♕h5 ♘f8

Black has managed to meet the threat to h7 without weakening his kingside. Since Black has also spent three tempi on this defensive manoeuvre, the balance between attack and defence has so far been maintained.

14 e5

This is the only way to make use of White's build-up on the h-file.

14...f5 15 exd6 ♘bd7

Black plans ...♘f6 followed by ...♕xd6, regaining the pawn with a promising position thanks to White's misplaced pieces.

16 ♗e3?

This allows Black to execute his plan without a fight. The only good line is 16 ♕d1! ♘f6 17 ♗e2, retaining the d6-pawn, at least for the moment, and allowing the rook to return to d3. Then 17...♘g6 18 ♗h5 e5 19 fxe5 ♖xe5 20 ♗xg6 hxg6 21 ♗f4 ♖e6 leads to an unclear position in which Black's two bishops and ...♘g4 ideas compensate for White's extra pawn.

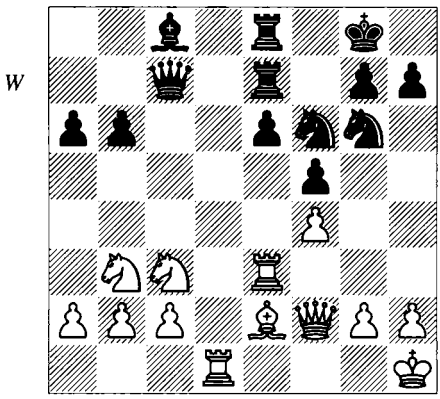
16...♘f6 17 ♕e2 ♕xd6 18 ♗xa7 ♖xa7

Black already stands better. After he plays ...b6 (or ...b5), followed by ...♖ae7 and ...♘g6, his pieces will all be actively placed. On the other hand, White will suffer from the weak f4-pawn and the misplaced rook on h3, which will take at least one tempo to bring back into play.

19 ♕f2 b6 20 ♗e2

It's necessary to cover g4 since otherwise ♖e3 can be met by ...♘g4, but this costs more time.

20...♖ae7 21 ♖d1 ♕c7 22 ♖e3 ♘g6



Both targeting the f4-pawn and preparing ...e5. There's now no trace left of White's attack.

23 g3?

Suicidally weakening the long diagonal, although even after 23 ♖d4 ♗b7 24 ♔g1 e5 25 fxe5 f4 26 ♖ed3 ♖xe5 Black has a large advantage.

23...♗b7+ 24 ♔g1 e5

The tables are turned and it is now Black who has an attack on the kingside.

25 fxe5 ♘xe5 26 ♘d4 g6?!

26...♘fg4 27 ♗xg4 fxg4 is much simpler, controlling the long diagonal and the f3-square.

27 ♕f4 b5 28 a3 ♗a8 29 ♖f1 ♕b7 30 ♘f3 ♘fg4 31 ♖xe5 ♘xe5 32 h3 ♕b6+ 33 ♔h2 ♘xf3+?!

33...♘g4+ 34 hxg4 ♖xe2+ 35 ♘xe2 ♖xe2+ followed by ...♖e4 is a neater finish.

34 ♗xf3 ♕e3??

An exchange up for nothing, almost any move would have won, except this.

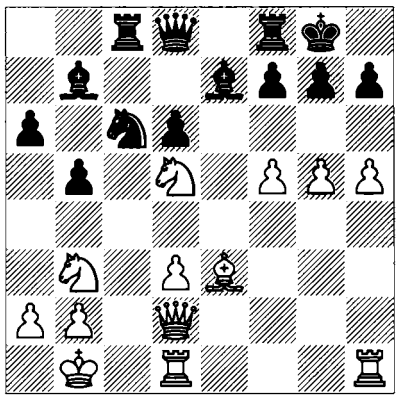
35 ♗d5+??

35 ♗xa8 ♖xa8 (35...♕xf4? 36 ♗d5+ favours White) 36 ♘d5 regains the exchange and draws.

35...♔g7 36 ♕d6 ♕d2+ 37 ♔g1 ♖e1 0-1

60 Exchanging Attacking Pieces

A standard defensive technique is to exchange the attacker's most dangerous pieces. In particular, swapping queens greatly reduces the force of most attacks. The defender should be on the alert for any possibility to liquidate material, even if this involves some tactics.



Külaots – G. Hernandez
Calvia Olympiad 2004

This position looks terrifying for Black. Without making any sacrifice, White has advanced all his kingside pawns to the fifth rank, while Black's queenside play has barely got off the ground. There's no doubt that White has a dangerous attack, but with the correct defensive plan Black is able to save the game.

22...♘e5!

The only decent move. The monster d5-knight is the linchpin of White's attack and Black has to force its exchange straight away. 22...♖e8?, for example, is too slow and after 23 f6 ♗f8 24 fxg7 ♗xg7 25 ♗b6 ♕d7 26 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 27 gxf6 the open g-file will be fatal for Black.

23 ♘xe7+

The alternative is 23 ♕g2, so that an exchange on d5 would leave the white queen in an active position. After 23...♗xd5 24 ♕xd5 ♗xg5 25 ♗xg5 ♕xg5 26 h6 g6 27 fxg6 hxg6 28 ♘d2, followed by ♘e4, White has sufficient play for the pawn but no more than that.

23...♕xe7

The exchange on e7 has not only removed a dangerous attacking piece, but it has also left Black's bishop undisputed master of the long diagonal.

24 f6

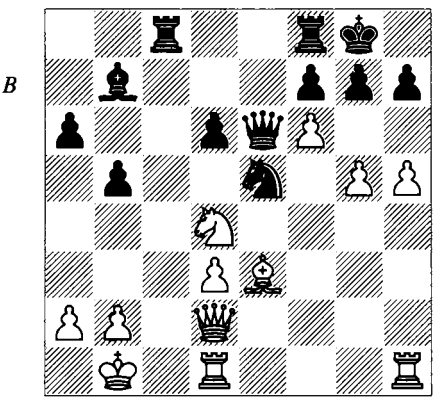
24 ♖hf1? ♗f3 25 f6 ♕b7 26 fxg7 ♖fe8 favours Black.

24...♕e6

This defence is based on a neat tactical point. 24...♕d7!? is more ambitious but also riskier, since after 25 fxg7 ♖fe8 26 ♖hf1 ♗f3 27 ♘d4 ♗xh5 28 ♘f5 ♗g6 29 ♘h6+ ♔xg7 30 ♗d4 White has enough play for the pawn.

25 ♘d4

25 fxg7?! ♖fe8 26 ♘d4 ♘f3 27 ♘xe6 ♘xd2+ 28 ♗xd2 ♗xh1 slightly favours Black.



25...♘f3!

Black uses tactics to force the exchange of queens. Instead 25...♕d7?! 26 ♖h4 would favour White.

26 ♘xe6

White has no choice, as 26 ♕f2 ♘xd4 27 ♗xd4 ♗xh1 28 fxg7 ♖fe8 29 ♖xh1 ♕e2 is good for Black.

26...♘xd2+ 27 ♗xd2 fxe6 28 ♖hf1

The series of exchanges has left an equal opposite-coloured bishop endgame.

28...♗g2 29 ♖f2 ♗h3

Black plans to transfer his bishop to the f5-square.

30 ♗c3 ♗g4 31 ♖e1 e5!?

31...♗f5 is also safe for Black.

32 ♗b4 ♖c6 33 ♖c1 ♖xc1+ 34 ♔xc1 gxf6 35 gxf6 ♗xh5 36 ♗xd6 ♖d8 37 ♗xe5 ♖xd3 38 ♖d2 ½-½

Vitiugov – Ni Hua

China-Russia rapid match, Sochi 2009

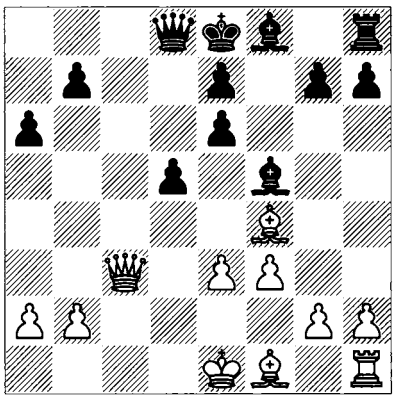
1 c4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♗f4 ♘c6 6 e3 a6 7 ♖c1 ♗f5 8 ♘f3 ♖c8 9 ♘e5 ♘xe5 10 dxe5 ♘e4 11 ♘xe4 ♖xc1 12 ♕xc1 ♗xe4 13 e6

If White wants to make anything of this rather dull position, he's practically forced to go in for this pawn sacrifice.

13...fxe6

13...♕a5+ 14 ♔e2 fxe6 15 f3 ♗f5 is another playable option.

14 f3 ♗f5 15 ♕c3



White has sufficient compensation, since Black's pawns have been weakened and his kingside development has been obstructed.

15...h5!

Black plans ...♖g8 followed by ...g6 (or ...g5), releasing the f8-bishop, but 15...♖g8? immediately is met by 16 g4, and if the bishop moves to g6 Black still cannot develop his kingside.

16 ♗e2 ♖g8 17 0-0 g5 18 ♗e5

Preventing ...♗g7, so Black seeks counterplay by pushing the g-pawn, which also enhances the strength of ...♗h6.

18...g4 19 e4!?

An interesting attempt to open lines and sharpen the game. 19 f4 ♔f7 followed by ...♗g7 is fine for Black, but 19 ♖c1 ♔f7 20 ♕d4 is safest, with enough play for the pawn.

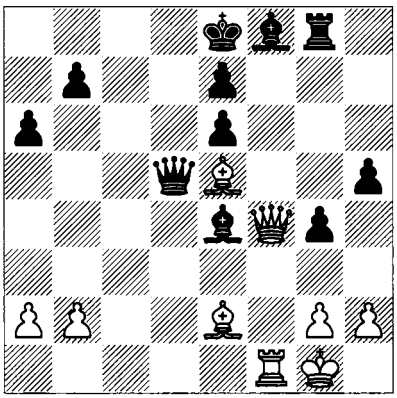
19...dxe4 20 fxe4?

This looks correct since it opens the f-file, but Black has some surprising defensive resources. 20 ♖d1! is best, and after 20...♕b6+ 21 ♗d4 ♕c6 22 ♕xc6+ bxc6 23 f4 an unclear ending results in which Black has two extra pawns but a severely damaged pawn-structure.

20...♗xe4 21 ♕e3

White's attack looks very strong but Black can defend by playing to exchange White's aggressively-placed pieces.

21...♕d5 22 ♕f4



22...♗h6!!

The key move. White has a choice between taking the h6-bishop, capturing the rook by ♕f7+ and ♕xg8 or winning the queen with ♕f7+ and ♖d1, but they all fail. The net effect of Black's move is to force exchanges by tactical means. In addition to more conventional methods of offering piece exchanges, the defender should be alert to such tactical liquidations.

23 ♕f7+

23 ♕xh6 ♕xe5 24 ♕e3 ♖g5 is very good for Black, as the exchange of dark-squared bishops has removed one of White's most dangerous attacking pieces.

23...♔d7 24 ♖d1

24 ♕xg8? ♗e3+ 25 ♖f2 ♕d2 leads to mate in a few moves, so White goes for the queen.

24...♕xd1+! 25 ♗xd1 ♖f8

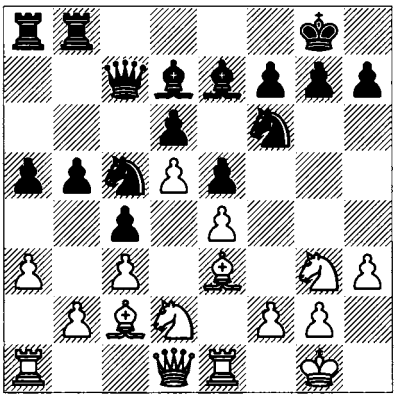
This is the point. White must return the queen or he is mated by ...♗e3+ and ...♖f1#.

26 ♕xf8 ♗xf8

The effect of Black's play has been to exchange all the major pieces, leaving him two pawns ahead in the ending. There's still some work to do due to the doubled isolated e-pawns, but Black won in the end (0-1, 74).

61 Avoiding Weaknesses

B



Smirnov – Romanov
Moscow 2008

White's plan is to start a kingside attack by f4 and ♖f1. This might be followed up by playing ♘f5, or White might prefer to play f5 followed by g4-g5. At the moment Black's queenside counterplay has stalled, since ...b4 is met by axb4 followed by ♖xa8 and cxb4. Black's first task is to set up a kingside defence, but he should also have in view eventual queenside play. Objectively speaking, White has a slight advantage, but he must not overestimate his attack.

18...♘e8

Note how Black avoids touching his kingside pawns except when it's really essential. Playing a move such as ...h6 not only weakens g6 (especially if Black has to play ...f6 later) but also introduces the possibility of a sacrifice on h6.

19 f4 ♗d8!

Retreating to f8 is too passive. From here the bishop can become active at b6.

20 ♔h2 ♕c8 21 ♕e2 ♗b6 22 ♖f1 f6

This modest pawn move helps Black's defence by reinforcing e5 and opening the second rank for a lateral defence using his rooks.

23 ♘h5

With ideas of ♖f3-g3 and ♘f3-h4, it looks dangerous for Black, who clearly needs more defensive pieces on the kingside.

23...♕d8 24 ♖f3 ♗c8!

Preparing ...♘d7-f8 to reinforce the kingside, while clearing the second rank.

25 ♖g3?!

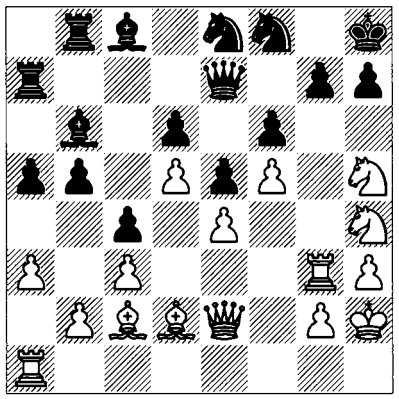
A pawn advance with f5 followed by g4-g5 is a better way to continue the attack.

25...♔h8 26 f5 ♖a7 27 ♘f3 ♘d7 28 ♗d2 ♘f8

The knight arrives to cover h7 but also to counter a possible sacrifice on g6 after ♘h4.

29 ♘h4 ♕e7

W



The culmination of Black's defensive plan. The knights cover several important squares on the kingside, while the rook and queen operate along the second rank. White now realizes that attacking solely with pieces isn't going to work, so he plays his rook back to f3 to clear the way for g4-g5. However, Black's queenside play, which at one time appeared irrelevant, now assumes a more important role.

30 ♖f3 ♗c5 31 g4?!

31 ♖af1 b4 32 ♗c1 is a better defence, keeping the queenside intact for the moment.

31...b4 32 axb4 axb4 33 ♖xa7 ♕xa7

Black is now threatening to penetrate on the queenside with rook and queen, so White makes a last desperate attempt to break through.

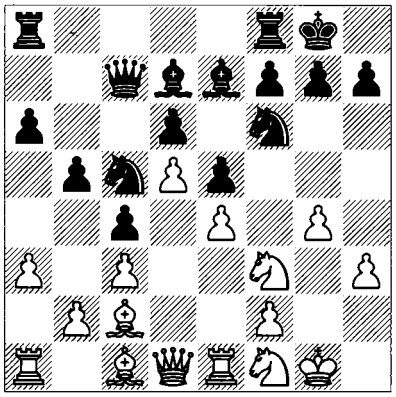
34 g5 bxc3 35 ♗xc3?

35 bxc3 ♕f7 36 ♖f1 ♖b2 also favours Black, but White still has some defensive chances.

35...fxg5 36 f6 g6 37 f7 ♘g7 38 ♘xg7 ♔xg7 39 ♘g2 g4 40 ♖f1 gxh3 41 ♘f4 ♖b7 42 ♕xc4 ♖xf7 43 b4 ♗e3 44 ♘xh3 0-1

44...♗xh3 45 ♖xf7+ ♕xf7 46 ♔xh3 ♕f3+ 47 ♔h2 ♕f2+ 48 ♔h3 ♗f4 leads to a quick mate.

B



Hou Yifan – Kosteniuk
Women's World Ch (1), Nalchik 2008

Here we have the same general Closed Ruy Lopez structure as in the previous example. Once again White has attacking chances on the kingside, based on ♘g3, ♔h2, ♖g1 and eventually ♘f5, but this time Black's method of dealing with the danger is radically different.

17...h5!

How can this be justified? Isn't this against the basic rule of not playing weakening pawn moves on the side where you are being attacked? Indeed, if White were given a few more moves to build up on the kingside then an advance such as this would be suicidal. However, in this position White's pieces are not yet in attacking positions, while the g4-pawn is poorly defended. This gives Black the chance to make a pre-emptive strike on the kingside to fight for space and activity. It's important to emphasize that the decision to play like this has to be made early, before the attacker establishes a preponderance of pieces in the relevant sector of the board.

18 ♘3h2

18 gxh5 ♗xh3 19 ♘g3 ♗g4 is even worse, as White is caught in a nasty pin and the h5-pawn is very weak.

18...hxg4 19 hxg4 ♕c8 20 f3

This move is rather passive, but 20 g5 ♘h7 21 ♕h5 g6 22 ♕h4 f6 23 gxf6 ♘xf6 24 ♘f3 ♖f7 also favours Black, as the threats of 25...♘fxe4 and 25...♖h7 are very awkward. This line is another example of how Black can seize the initiative on the kingside before White manages to get her own pieces into effective positions.

20...♘h7

Preparing ...♗g5 to exchange off the bad bishop without the lengthy manoeuvre via d8 we saw in the previous example. Note how ineffective the knight on h2 is.

21 ♘g3 ♗g5 22 ♘f5!? ♕d8 23 ♔g2

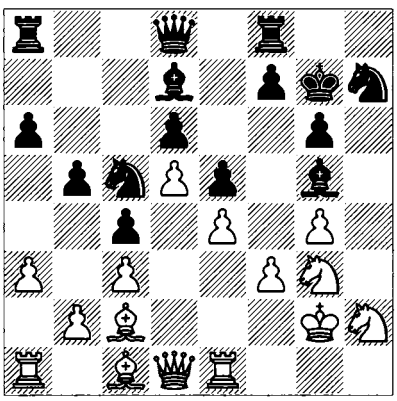
23 ♘xd6? loses to 23...♕b6.

23...g6 24 ♘g3?

This passive retreat seals White's fate. Having played the aggressive ♘f5, White should be consistent and continue with the piece sacrifice 24 ♘xd6! ♗xc1 25 ♕xc1 ♕f6 26 ♘f5 gxf5 27 gxf5 when, although White has only two pawns for the piece, the d7-bishop is completely sealed out of the game and it will be very difficult for Black to exploit her material advantage.

24...♔g7

W



Now everything is in order for Black. The white knights are poorly posted and Black is heading for domination of the kingside dark squares.

25 ♖h1 ♖h8 26 ♘hf1 ♕f6 27 ♗e3 ♗xe3 28 ♘xe3 ♘g5 29 ♕e2 ♖ag8 30 ♖af1 ♕f4 31 ♖xh8?!

31 ♕f2 offers more resistance, although Black is much better in any case.

31...♖xh8 32 ♖h1 ♖xh1 33 ♘xh1 ♘d3

There's no real answer to Black's threat of 34...♘xf3 35 ♕xf3 ♘e1+.

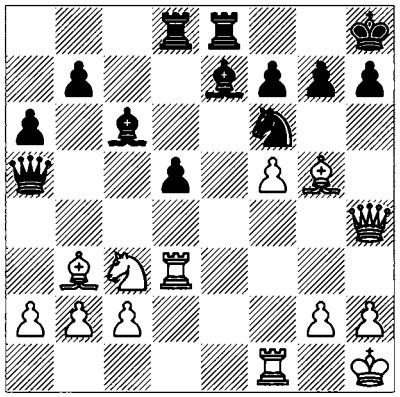
34 ♗xd3 cxd3 35 ♕f2 d2 36 ♘g3 ♘xf3! 37 ♕xf3 ♗xg4 38 ♕f2 d1♕ 39 ♘xd1 ♗xd1

Black is a pawn up with a large positional advantage.

40 ♕e1 ♗f3+ 41 ♔g1 f5 42 exf5 gxf5 43 ♕f2 ♔g6 44 b3 e4 45 c4 bxc4 46 bxc4 ♕g5 47 c5 f4 48 cxd6 fxg3 0-1

62 The Defensive Sacrifice

B



Illescas – Andersson
Ubeda 1997

White clearly has a dangerous attack on the kingside, with 20 ♖h3 being an immediate danger. It would be easy to panic at the prospect of mate on h7, but Andersson reacts with extraordinary coolness.

19...♕c5!

Black is prepared to offer his h-pawn to nullify White's attack, and he uses the spare tempo to bring his queen to a more central position.

20 ♖h3 ♔g8

This is forced, since 20...h6?? loses at once to 21 ♗xh6, but it's still a remarkable idea.

21 ♗xf6?!

The logical consequence of White's play, but he would be better off either forcing a draw by 21 ♖g3 ♔h8 22 ♖h3 or, if he wanted to play on, trying 21 a3.

21...♗xf6 22 ♕xh7+ ♔f8

It turns out that White's attack has collapsed since Black's king can easily run away to e7 and d7, while White's queen and rook are left isolated on the h-file. Black, on the other hand, has two good bishops and a well-centralized position. White must also take care because he has only one rook defending his back rank.

23 ♕h8+

This preliminary check is designed to block the e-file, since after 23 ♕h5 ♖e5 Black finds it easier to double rooks on the e-file.

23...♔e7 24 ♕h5

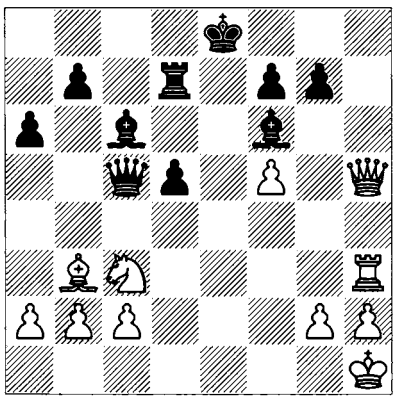
24 ♖e1+?? loses at once to 24...♔d7.

24...♖d7!

24...♔d7?! rather unnecessarily allows 25 ♗xd5, although even this isn't so clear after 25...♔c8. However, the move played makes more sense since it allows the king to cross to the queenside behind the rook.

25 ♖e1+ ♔d8 26 ♖xe8+ ♔xe8

W



27 ♕h8+?!

Going the wrong way, as the queen will be needed to defend the back rank. 27 ♕d1 is relatively best, although after 27...d4 28 ♘e2 (28 ♖h8+ ♔e7 29 ♕e2+ ♕e5 30 ♕xe5+ ♗xe5 31 ♘d1 d3 32 c3 ♔f6 is very good for Black) 28...♕xf5 Black regains the pawn with a definite advantage thanks to his active bishops.

27...♔e7 28 ♘d1?

Now it's all over. 28 ♕h5 was the last chance to resist, but even here 28...♔d8 29 ♕d1 d4 30 ♘e2 ♕xf5 leaves Black a tempo up over the previous note.

28...d4

Threatening ...♕e5 followed by a back-rank mate.

29 ♕g8 ♕e5

29...♕xf5! 30 ♔g1 (or 30 ♕xf7+ ♔d8 31 ♕f8+ ♔c7) 30...♕g4 wins at once.

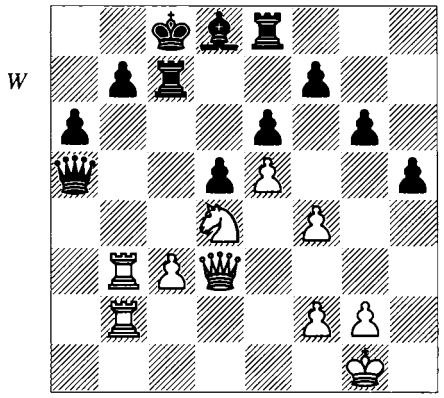
30 ♕xf7+ ♔d8 31 ♖h8+ ♔c7 32 ♕e8 ♕xf5 33 ♕e1

Black also wins after 33 ♔g1 ♕g4.

33...♖e7 34 ♕g3+ ♔b6 35 ♗c4 ♕xc2 36 ♗b3 0-1

It's mate in two by 36...♕xg2+ 37 ♕xg2 ♖e1# or 36...♖e1+ 37 ♕xe1 ♕xg2#.

In the previous example, the defensive sacrifice consisted of a mere pawn, but sometimes a more substantial investment can be made in the interests of fending off an attack. Larger defensive sacrifices become more likely if the attacker has already given up some material.



Miladinović – Lajthajm
Montenegrin Team Ch, Herceg Novi 2008

Black has two extra pawns, but White has a dangerous attack along the b-file.

27 ♕b1

A crucial moment. Black can force a draw by 27...♔d7 28 ♖xb7 ♕xc3 29 ♕d1 ♖xb7 30 ♖xb7+ ♗c7 31 ♕a4+ ♔c8 32 ♖a7 ♕c1+ 33 ♔h2 ♕xf4+ 34 ♔g1, but can he play for a win? By giving up his queen, Black eliminates the danger to his king and steers the game into an ending in which he has winning chances without any risk.

27...♖ee7!

An excellent choice. Not, however, 27...b5? 28 ♖a2 ♕b6 29 ♕a1 and Black loses.

28 ♘b5

There is nothing better than to play to win the queen, since otherwise Black consolidates his extra material by playing ...♕c5.

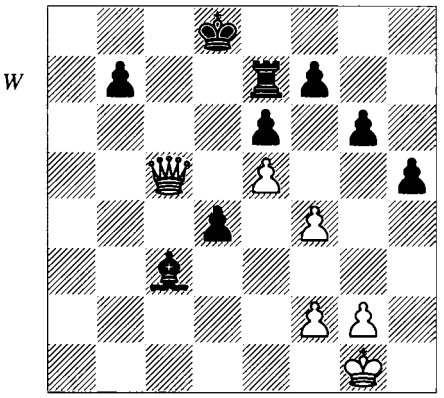
28...axb5 29 ♖a2 ♖xc3

Forced, since 29...♕b6? loses to 30 ♖xb5 ♕c6 31 ♖b6 ♕c5? 32 ♖a8+ ♔d7 33 ♖d6+.

30 ♖xa5 ♗xa5 31 ♖xc3+ ♗xc3 32 ♕xb5

The upshot of Black's sacrifice is that material equality is more or less restored, but with only his queen left, White's attack has vanished, and the most he can hope for is perpetual check. However, it is not so easy to achieve this.

32...d4 33 ♕c5+ ♔d8



34 ♔f1

If White continues checking, he still runs into trouble: 34 ♕d6+ ♖d7 35 ♕f8+ ♔c7 36 ♕c5+ ♔b8 37 ♕f8+ (37 ♔f1 ♖d5 38 ♕f8+ ♔a7 39 ♕xf7?! d3 40 ♕xe6 ♖a5 also wins for Black) 37...♔a7 38 ♕c5+ ♔a6 39 ♕c8 (after 39 ♕c4+ ♔b6 40 ♕b3+ ♔c5 41 ♕a3+ ♗b4 the checks run out) 39...♖d5 40 ♕c7 d3! 41 ♕xc3 d2 42 ♕a1+ ♔b5 43 ♕b1+ ♔c6 44 ♕c2+ ♔d7 45 ♕a4+ ♔d8 46 ♕d1 b5 47 ♔f1 b4 48 ♔e2 ♔e7 (now White can only move his pawns since a king move is met by ...b3) 49 g3 ♖d7 50 f3 ♖d5 (White is in a fatal zugzwang) 51 g4 h4 and Black wins.

34...♖d7 35 ♕f8+ ♔c7 36 ♕c5+ ♔b8 37 ♕f8+ ♔a7 38 ♔e2

Or 38 ♕c5+ ♔a6 39 ♕c8 ♖d5 40 ♕c7 (no better is 40 ♕c7 ♔a7) 40...d3 41 ♕c4+ ♔b6 42 ♕xc3 d2 43 ♕b3+ ♔c7 44 ♕d1 b5 45 ♔e2 ♔d7! and Black wins as in the previous note.

38...d3+ 39 ♔d1 ♖d5

Black's king is now safe and there is no way White can prevent Black from playing ...d2 followed by the transfer of his rook to the first rank.

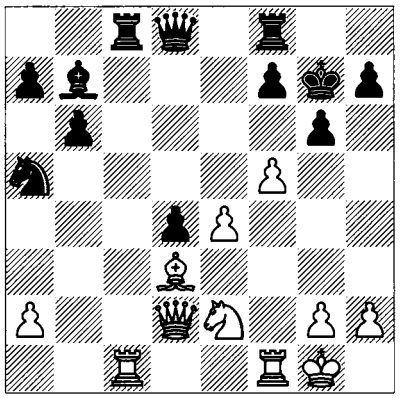
40 ♕c8 ♗a5 41 ♕c4 d2 42 g3 ♔b6 43 ♕b3+

After 43 ♕a4 g5! 44 fxg5 ♖c5 45 ♕d4 ♔b5 46 ♕d7+ ♔a6 47 ♕d3+ ♔a7 48 ♕d4 b6 49 ♕d7+ ♔a6 Black wins because now 50 ♔e2 can be met by 50...♖xe5+.

43...♖b5 44 ♕d3 ♖d5 45 ♕b3+ ♔c6 46 ♕a4+ 0-1

Black wins after 46...♔c7 47 ♕e8 ♔b6 48 ♕e7 (48 ♕a4 g5! transposes to the previous note) 48...♖d4 49 ♕e8 ♗b4 followed by ...♖c4.

63 Coolness under Fire



Shirov – Vachier-Lagrave
Wijk aan Zee 2011

This position appears very dangerous for Black. White threatens to play f6+ followed by ♕h6, creating typical mating ideas at g7 or h7. Nor can Black prevent the pawn's advance, since 18...f6? loses material after 19 ♘f4. Nevertheless, by keeping a cool head Black can not only defend but even put White under pressure.

18...♖xc1

When defending, it's usually a good idea to swap off pieces even if you can't see a concrete line in which the exchange proves useful. In this case, the rook exchange helps Black because later he can obtain counterplay by checking with his queen on c5 or on White's first rank.

19 ♕xc1 ♘c6

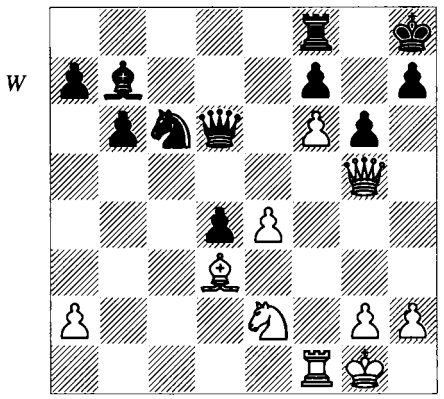
Black will need his knight to help defend.

20 f6+ ♔h8 21 ♕g5

White cannot play for mate at once; for example, 21 ♖f3 ♘e5 22 ♖h3 ♕xf6 or 21 ♕h6 ♖g8 22 ♖f3 ♕f8 23 ♕g5 ♕c5 24 ♕h6 ♕h5 and the attack is repulsed in both cases. Playing the queen to g5 defends the f6-pawn, and so threatens ♖f3-h3 (or ♖f4-h4). Moreover, in many lines White is able to play e5 to include the d3-bishop in the attack.

21...♕d6!

The only move not to lose by force. Passive defence is hopeless; for example, 21...♖g8? 22 ♖f4 ♕f8 23 ♖h4 ♘b4 (23...♗c8 loses to 24 g4 followed by ♖h3 and ♕h4) 24 ♘f4 ♘xd3 25 ♘xd3 ♗c8 26 ♘e5 (threatening 27 ♕h6) 26...♗e6 27 ♘f3 and there is no defence against 28 ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 29 ♕h4+ ♕h6 30 ♘g5+. When defending, it's important not to play a passive move such as ...♖g8 voluntarily; you should wait until it is forced. The move played prevents e5 by White and puts the queen where it can either retreat to f8, if necessary, or develop counterplay by moving to b4 or a3.



22 ♘g3?

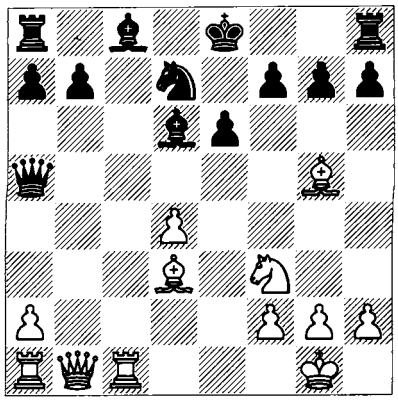
White threatens 23 ♘f5, but this is easily countered and then the knight proves to be poorly placed. The best line is 22 ♖f4! ♖e8! (making sure that e5 is controlled) 23 ♖h4 ♕f8! (23...♔g8? 24 ♘g3 ♗c8 25 ♘h5 ♕b4 26 h3 gives White a winning attack) 24 ♘f4 ♘e5 25 ♘h3 (25 ♗b5?! d3 26 ♘xd3 ♘xd3 27 ♗xd3 ♔g8 28 h3 ♖e6! 29 ♔h1 ♕d8 30 ♕h6 ♕xf6 31 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 32 ♕h6+ ♔e7 33 ♖f4 ♕e5 favours Black due to White's weak e-pawn – this line is an example of returning material to defuse the attack) 25...♘d7 26 ♕f4 ♔g8 27 ♘g5 h5 28 ♖xh5! (28 g4? ♘e5 29 ♗b5 ♖c8! 30 ♕xe5 ♖c5 is good for Black) 28...gxh5 29 ♘h7! ♔xh7 30 ♕f5+ ♔h6 31 ♕f4+ with perpetual check.

22...♖g8!

Suddenly the attack collapses. The only aggressive move is 23 ♖f4 but then 23...♕c5! 24 ♕h6 ♕c1+ 25 ♗f1 d3 followed by ...♕e3+ and ...d2 wins for Black. The pin along the c1-h6 diagonal totally paralyses White's attack.

23 ♗c4 ♘e5 24 ♗b3 d3 25 h3 ♗a6 26 ♖f4 d2 27 ♔h2 ♕c5 28 h4 ♘d3 29 e5 ♘xf4 30 ♘e4 ♘e6 31 ♗xe6 ♕c6 32 ♗xf7 d1♕ 0-1

W



Lupulescu – Nanu
Galati 2007

White has made a correct pawn sacrifice; his large lead in development more than compensates for the pawn. Nevertheless, he should act quickly or Black will play ...h6 and ...0-0, reducing White's immediate attacking chances.

16 d5!

Opening the position while Black's king is still in the centre. Now it would be easy for Black to lose quickly, but by keeping calm he denies White a forced win.

16...♘e5

Not 16...♕xd5?, losing to 17 ♗e4 ♕a5 18 ♗xb7 ♗xb7 19 ♕xb7 ♖b8 20 ♖c8+. However, 16...exd5 17 ♗f5 ♘b6 18 ♗d2 ♕a4 is possible, when White has the choice between 19 ♗xc8 ♖xc8 20 ♖xc8+ ♘xc8 21 ♕xb7 0-0 22 ♕xd5 with a positional edge, or 19 ♗c2 ♕a6 20 ♘g5 ♗e6 21 ♗xh7 ♘c4 22 ♗c3 0-0-0 23 ♗xg7 with a slight advantage for White in a complicated position.

17 ♗b5+ ♔f8

Forced, since 17...♗d7? loses to 18 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 19 ♕xb7.

18 ♘d4 exd5

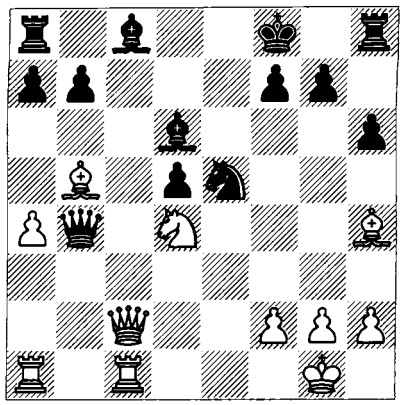
18...a6? is bad due to 19 dxe6 axb5 20 ♕f5 (now White is threatening 21 e7+) 20...♗xe6 21 ♘xe6+ ♔g8 22 ♘xg7 and the attack breaks through.

19 a4?

The plan of developing the rook via a2 is too slow. The correct continuation is 19 ♕b3! ♗e6 20 ♖e1 ♕b6 21 ♗e3 ♕d8 22 ♘xe6+ fxe6 23 ♗d4, when White's threats against Black's vulnerable king are more important than the two extra pawns. After the move played, Black has time to organize his defences.

19...h6 20 ♗h4 ♕b4 21 ♕c2

B



This was White's idea: 21...♕xd4?? loses to 22 ♕xc8+ ♖xc8 23 ♖xc8#. However, not all sacrifices have to be accepted.

21...g5!

Giving the black king some air with gain of tempo. 21...♗g4! is also very strong.

22 ♗g3 ♕xd4 23 ♖d1

The danger is not yet over. If Black defends passively by, for example, 23...♕b6? 24 ♖xd5 f6 then 25 a5 ♕c7 26 ♕d2 ♔e7 27 ♖c1 ♕b8 28 ♖d1 gives White at least enough compensation for the piece.

23...♘f3+!

However, by returning the piece on his own terms, Black secures a clear advantage. His queen is able to retreat towards the endangered kingside, and he prevents White from taking on d5 because his a1-rook is hanging.

24 gxf3 ♕f6 25 ♖ab1

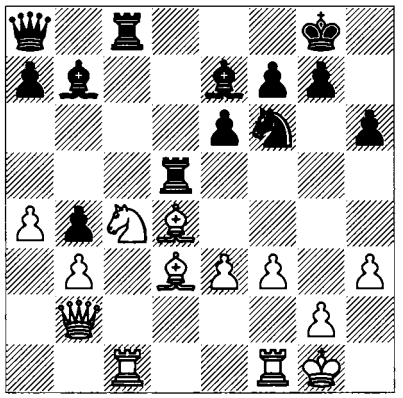
25 ♗xd6+ ♕xd6 26 ♗c4 ♗e6 27 ♕b2 ♔g8 28 ♕xb7 ♖b8 29 ♕xa7 regains the pawns, but after 29...♖b4 30 ♕a6 ♕c5 31 ♗e2 ♕c7 32 ♖ac1 ♕e5 Black has a large advantage due to White's weakened kingside; the immediate threat is 33...♖h4.

25...♗xg3 26 fxg3 ♗e6 27 ♗e2 ♖c8 28 ♕d3 b6 29 ♕a6 ♖c7 30 a5 ♔g7 31 axb6 axb6 32 ♖xb6 ♖d8

Black has consolidated his position and is a pawn up with more active pieces. He won easily:

33 ♖b4 d4 34 ♕d3 ♖c3 35 ♕b1 d3 36 ♖xd3 ♗f5 37 ♖b6 ♗xd3 38 ♗xd3 ♖cxd3 0-1

64 Running with the King



Korchnoi – Sakaev
Russian Team Ch, Dagomys 2008

White has a slight advantage. His pieces are well placed on central squares and the secure outpost on c4 provides a useful jumping-off point for his forces. By contrast, Black's line-up on the long diagonal is not very effective due to the pawns on g2 and f3. A simple move such as 27 ♖fd1 would maintain White's edge, but instead he embarks on a plan to penetrate with his queen to h7.

27 ♗b1 ♖cd8 28 ♕c2 ♔f8

Black responds to White's plan by edging his king away from the threatening check on h7. Up to this point White has not made a mistake; lining up his queen and bishop has cost a little time, but he hasn't made any irrevocable commitment.

29 ♗xf6?

But this is totally wrong. White, it is true, gets his queen to h7, but it turns out that this doesn't create any serious threat. On the other hand, the concessions White makes with this move are serious: the d-file is opened for Black's rooks, White forfeits the two bishops, and the c3-square, which hadn't hitherto been relevant, now becomes a splendid outpost for Black's dark-squared bishop. 29 ♘e5 is much better, when White can still claim an advantage.

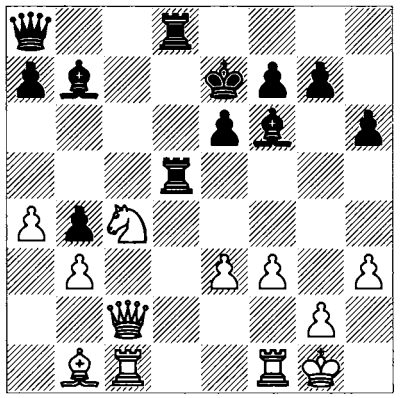
29...♗xf6 30 ♕h7

This sets up various threats, such as 31 ♗e4 ♖5d7 32 ♘d6! ♖xd6 33 ♖c7 ♖6d7 34 ♗xb7 ♕b8 35 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 36 ♕h8+. Unfortunately for Korchnoi, the threats can all be countered by one simple response.

30...♔e7!

Black's king moves out of the danger zone and at the same time he prevents 31 ♗e4 due to 31...♖h8, trapping the queen. Suddenly it is obvious that the queen is doing nothing on h7, so Korchnoi brings it back to c2.

31 ♕c2



White's plan hasn't really inconvenienced Black, while he has gravely weakened his own position.

31...♖c5?!

31...♗a6! is even stronger, threatening ...♗c3 followed by ...♗xc4 and ...♖d2.

32 ♖fd1 ♗d5 33 ♕e2 ♗xc4 34 ♖xc4 ♖xd1+ 35 ♕xd1 ♖xc4 36 bxc4 ♕c6

The liquidation has left White in serious trouble. His queenside pawns are weak and his bishop passively placed, while Black has a dangerous passed pawn.

37 ♕b3 ♕d6 38 ♗d3 a5 39 f4 g5

Black pursues the strategy of creating a second target by playing to expose White's king.

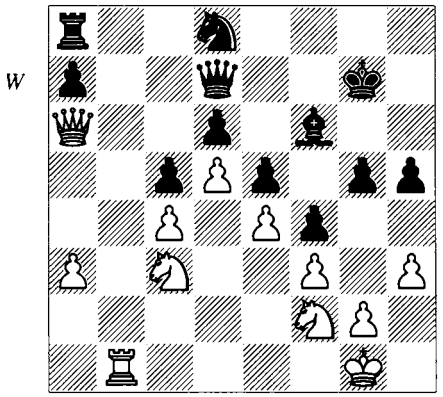
40 g3 h5 41 ♕c2 ♕c5 42 ♔f2 h4

Undermining the pawn-chain.

43 ♕d2 b3 44 fxg5 hxg3+ 45 ♔xg3 ♕xg5+ 46 ♔f3 b2 47 ♕h2 ♕h5+ 48 ♔g2 ♕c5 49 ♕g1 ♕d6 50 ♗e4 ♕d2+ 51 ♕f2 ♕c1 52 ♕c2 ♕xe3 53 c5 ♗d4 54 c6 f5 0-1

It's mate after 55 c7 ♕g1+ 56 ♔f3 b1♕ 57 ♕xb1 ♕f2# or 55 ♗d3 ♕g1+ 56 ♔f3 b1♕ 57 ♕xb1 ♕f2#.

Sometimes even large-scale king-marches are possible. These tend to be of a prophylactic nature; in other words, a player is neutralizing the opponent's attacking chances in advance.



Fressinet – Lopez Martinez
Pamplona 2010

White has a clear advantage since his pieces are actively placed and he controls the b-file, while Black's bishop is bad and his only possible counterplay by ...g4 has been prevented. But for the moment Black is holding on and White cannot make direct progress since he cannot break down Black's defences unless he uses the f2-knight by, for example, ♘b5 followed by ♘d3-b2-a4-b6 or ♘d3-c1-b3-a5-c6. The problem is that as soon as the knight leaves f2, Black will play ...g4, generating active play against White's poorly-defended kingside and freeing his bishop to move to h4. The solution is simple: White must first evacuate his king from the vulnerable kingside and only then put the f2-knight to use.

35 ♔f1

The march starts.

35...♗e7 36 ♔e2 ♔f7 37 ♔d2 ♖c8 38 ♔c2 ♖a8

While the knight is on f2, Black cannot undertake any positive action so he just waits.

39 ♖b5

39 ♔b2? is wrong because Black can free his position by exchanging rooks, so first the rook must move up the b-file to allow the king to cross behind it.

39...♖c8 40 ♕a4

This doesn't achieve anything, but it also doesn't harm White's position. Black can only wait, so it doesn't matter if White loses some time.

40...♖a8 41 ♕a6 ♔f8 42 ♖b3 ♔f7 43 ♔b2

On a2 the king will be totally secure.

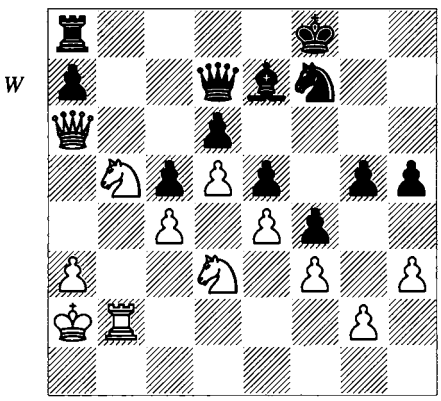
43...♔f8 44 ♔a2 ♔f7 45 ♘b5 ♔f8

Everything is ready for the f2-knight to join the rest of White's forces on the queenside.

46 ♘d3 ♔f7 47 ♖b1 ♔f8

With White's king safe on the queenside, opening lines by ...g4 only helps White; here 47...g4? loses to 48 hxg4 hxg4 49 ♖h1.

48 ♖b2 ♘f7



49 ♘c3 ♘d8 50 ♖b1 ♖c8 51 ♘b5 ♖a8 52 ♘b2?

This is wrong and gives Black a defensive chance. 52 ♘c1 is correct, heading for c6; after 52...♘f7 (52...g4 53 hxg4 hxg4 54 ♘b3 gxf3 55 gxf3 ♕b7 56 ♘xc5 ♕c8 57 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 58 ♘a6 ♖xc4 59 ♔b3 ♖c8 60 ♖h1 ♔g8 61 ♔b2 followed by ♖c1 is extremely unpleasant for Black) 53 ♘b3 ♗d8 54 ♘a5 ♗xa5 55 ♕xa5 ♘d8 56 ♕a6 Black is under strong pressure, although there is as yet no forced win for White.

52...♘f7?

Too passive. 52...♕b7! exploits the temporary obstruction of the b-file to relieve much of the pressure on Black's position.

53 ♘a4 ♗d8?! 54 ♘bc3?!

Missing an instant win by 54 ♘xd6! ♘xd6 (54...♕xd6 55 ♕b7) 55 ♘xc5 ♕e7 56 ♘e6+ followed by c5, but the move played is also sufficient since Black cannot prevent ♖b7.

54...g4 55 hxg4 hxg4 56 ♖b7 ♕c8 57 ♘b5 ♗b6 58 ♘xb6 axb6 59 ♕xb6 gxf3 60 gxf3 ♔g8 61 ♘c7 1-0

65 Counter-Attack

Ivanchuk – Topalov
Las Palmas 1996

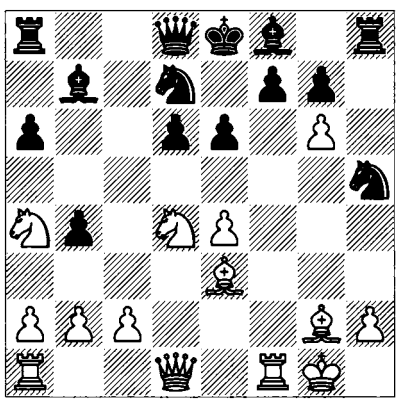
1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6 7 g4 h6 8 f4 b5 9 ♗g2 ♗b7 10 g5

White has adopted a sharp line which depends on a quick g5-g6 to break open the defences to Black's king. This is a very dangerous plan, and objectively it is the right choice, but it is not without risk since the pawn advance not only takes time, but also removes some of the pawns that would normally defend White's king. So long as White can maintain his initiative, Black will not be able to exploit this factor, but if the initiative falters, the empty space left by the pawns' advance will allow Black to launch a vicious counter-attack.

10...hxg5 11 fxg5 b4 12 ♘a4 ♘h5

Not 12...♘xe4? 13 ♕g4 d5 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 0-0-0 with a very dangerous attack.

13 0-0 ♘d7 14 g6



14...♘hf6

This is forced as Black cannot allow White's knight to land on e6.

15 c3 ♘e5

15...bxc3? loses to 16 gxf7+ ♔xf7 17 ♕b3 as both b7 and e6 are attacked.

16 gxf7+ ♔xf7 17 cxb4

White has won a pawn, and Black's king remains in an exposed position, so up to this point the game has run in White's favour. With an accurate follow-up, he could have consolidated his advantage, but Ivanchuk underestimated the danger of a counter-attack.

17...♖h4 18 ♕b3

18 ♗f4! is a simpler way of meeting the attack on e4, after which Black is struggling.

18...♕e8 19 ♖ac1?

The threat of ♖c7+ is less dangerous than it appears. 19 ♖f4 or 19 ♗f4 maintains a healthy advantage.

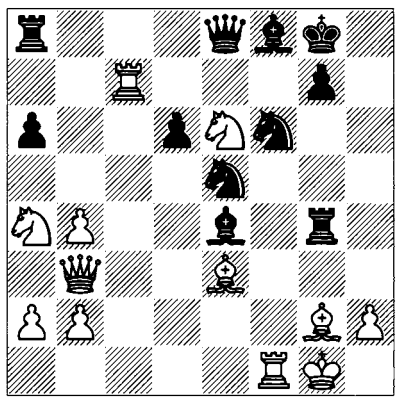
19...♗xe4 20 ♖c7+?!

Consistent, but the best line is 20 ♖f4 ♖xf4 21 ♗xf4 ♗xg2 22 ♔xg2 ♘d5 23 ♗g3, restricting Black to a slight advantage.

20...♔g8 21 ♘xe6

It all looks good for White since he has finally conquered the e6-square and threatens a discovered check with his knight.

21...♖g4!



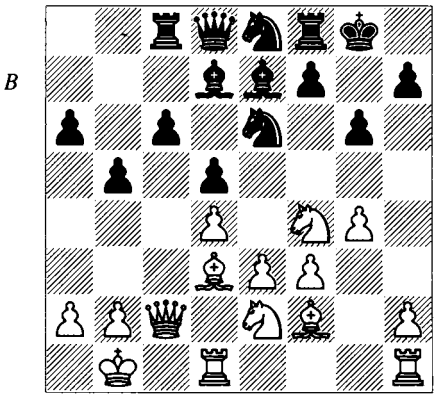
A horrible shock for White. His discovered checks turn out to be harmless, and it is Black's counter-attack which proves deadly. This is a perfect example of a common situation: aggressive double-edged play is fine so long as you can maintain the initiative, but if your opponent has a respite from the threats, the counter-attack is likely to strike with deadly force.

22 ♖xf6

There is no defence; for example, 22 ♘f4+ loses to 22...d5! 23 ♘c3 ♘f3+ 24 ♔f2 ♖xg2+ 25 ♘xg2 ♘g4+ 26 ♔g3 ♘xe3 27 ♘xe3 ♕e5+.

22...♖xg2+ 23 ♔f1 ♕b5+ 0-1

After 24 ♖c4 almost any move wins; for example, 24...gxf6 or 24...♕xc4+.



Marin – Ljubojević
Szirak Interzonal 1987

This position is roughly balanced. White has attacking chances on the kingside, while Black can create queenside counterplay by preparing ...c5. White's immediate threat is to play h4-h5, and Black takes steps to delay this advance.

17...♗h4 18 ♗g3 ♘8g7

For the moment White has no real threats, so Black uses the time to improve the position of his pieces. From g7 the knight can come to e6 in the event that the other knight is exchanged. It also clears the way for the rook to move to e8. It's not easy for Black to start his counterplay because ...c5 leaves the d-pawn hanging, but improving his piece placing will enhance his counterplay when it does finally start.

19 ♕d2 ♖e8 20 ♕e1

White kicks the bishop away from h4 to clear the way for the h-pawn's advance.

20...♗f6

The bishop will be well-placed on the long diagonal when ...c5 finally comes.

21 ♕f2 ♕e7 22 h4

White's attack gets under way. When faced with an attack on the king, it's important to assess the danger posed by the enemy attack objectively; above all, don't panic! Here White intends h5 followed by hxg6 and ♕h2, and in addition there is the immediate threat of g5 trapping the bishop. The first step is to get the knight away from g7 so as to give the bishop some air.

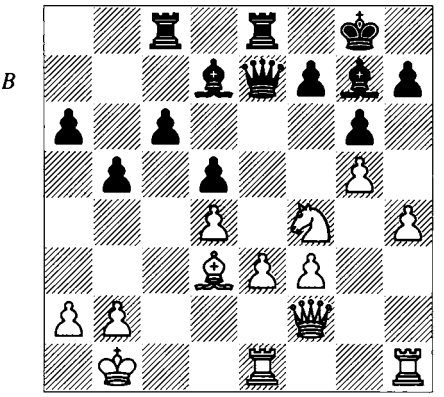
22...♘xf4 23 ♗xf4?!

This appears natural, but it is probably better to change tack and continue 23 exf4 c5 (23...♘e6?! 24 f5 is awkward) 24 dxc5 ♕xc5 25 ♕xc5 ♖xc5 26 ♗f2, when White's control of d4 gives him some endgame advantage.

23...♘e6

Now White faces a tricky choice, as 24 ♗g3 c5 gives Black decent counterplay, so White prefers to allow the exchange of the f4-bishop.

24 g5 ♘xf4 25 ♘xf4 ♗g7 26 ♖de1



Since the last diagram, the situation has changed in Black's favour even though his counter-attack hasn't actually started. The g7-bishop is a good defender of the kingside, so even if White penetrates with his queen to h7 it will not be mate.

26...♕d6

Defending d5 and so preparing ...c5, while also covering g6 to prevent a sacrifice there.

27 h5 c5

Thanks to Black's careful preparation, his counter-attack carries considerable force.

28 hxg6 hxg6 29 ♕h4 cxd4 30 exd4?

It is essential to block the long diagonal by 30 e4 to prevent the dark-squared bishop from participating in an attack on b2. In this case the position would be roughly level.

30...♖xe1+

Now everything goes wrong for White. One of his attacking pieces is deflected from the h-file, while Black is able to target b2.

31 ♖xe1 ♗xd4 32 ♘xg6

32 ♖h1 ♗g7 33 ♕h7+ ♔f8 also wins for Black.

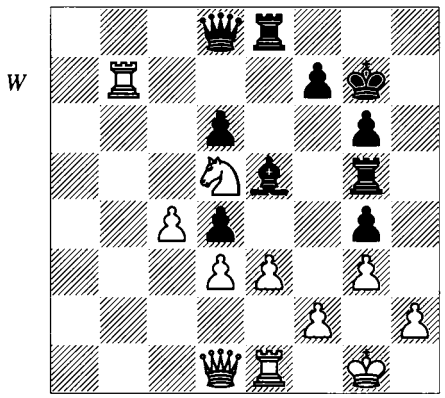
32...♕b4!

Defending d4 and at the same time threatening mate. White's position collapses.

33 ♖e2 fxg6 34 ♕h6 ♗xb2 0-1

66 Don't Panic!

From time to time you will face totally unexpected moves; for example, your opponent may make a sacrifice which you had overlooked. Many players panic when surprised and make mistakes which lose positions that could still be saved or even won. If you were winning before, don't dwell on the missed opportunities but focus on the current position and reassess it. Do you still have an advantage? If not, perhaps now would be a good time to look for a route to a draw. Above all, keep your head and stay calm.



Adianto – Sharavdorj
Yangon Zonal 1998

White has a winning position since he has an extra pawn, a superb d5-knight and an active rook on the seventh. His only concern is possible black counterplay down the h-file.

27 e4

The simplest win if followed up correctly.

27...♖h8

White has to take care, since Black even threatens to gain the advantage by 28...♖xh2! 29 ♔xh2 ♕h8+ 30 ♔g1 ♕h3.

28 f4??

A serious error allowing Black a surprising sacrifice. White could have won by 28 h4! gxh3 29 ♕f3, which totally neutralizes Black's counterplay. After 29...♕f8 30 ♖a1 followed by ♖aa7 Black's position collapses.

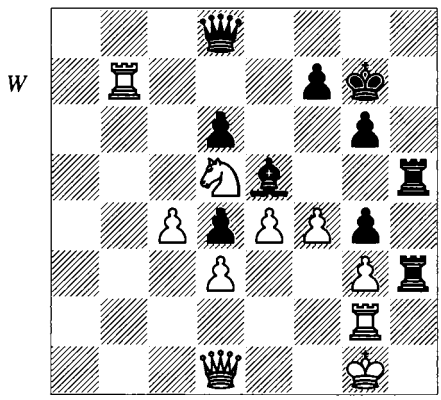
28...♖xh2!

This must have been quite a shock for White. It's easy to follow one mistake with a second one, so the first thing White should do is see if he can at any rate draw. Indeed, after 29 ♔xh2 ♕h8+ 30 ♔g1 (30 ♔g2 also draws: 30...♕h3+ 31 ♔f2 ♕h2+ 32 ♔f1 ♕xg3) 30...♖h5 31 ♖f1 ♖h1+ 32 ♔f2 ♕h2+ 33 ♔e1 ♕xg3+ 34 ♔d2 ♕g2+ 35 ♕e2 ♕xf1 36 ♕xf1 ♖xf1 37 ♔e2 (not 37 fxe5?? g3) 37...♖xf4 38 ♘xf4 ♗xf4 a drawn ending results. The next step is to see if there is a route to an advantage. Failing that, at least White should look for a way to force Black to play accurately.

29 ♖e2!?

Objectively speaking, White has no advantage, but this forces Black to find the right reply.

29...♖h3 30 ♖g2 ♖gh5!



Black continues accurately and now White should acquiesce to a draw by 31 ♕xg4 ♕a5 32 ♕e2 ♕a1+ 33 ♔f2 ♖h2 34 ♔f3 ♖xg2 35 ♕xg2 ♕d1+ 36 ♕e2 ♕h1+ 37 ♕g2.

31 ♔f2? ♖h1?

Missing a win by 31...♕a8! 32 ♖b2 ♖h2 33 fxe5 dxe5, when White has no defence against ...♕h8 with a lethal attack down the h-file.

32 ♕xg4

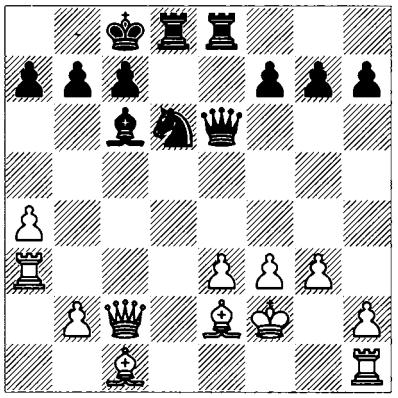
Having overlooked a win, it is now Black who must avoid panicking, but he fails.

32...♕a8?

This would have won last move, but is now too late. A draw was still available by 32...♕a5! 33 ♕e2 ♗f6 34 ♘c7 ♕a4 35 ♘e6+ ♔g8 36 ♖b8+ ♔h7 37 ♖b7 ♔g8 with repetition.

33 ♕d7 1-0

Black is helpless; for example, 33...♕a2+ 34 ♔f3 ♖f1+ 35 ♔g4 ♕xg2 36 ♕xf7+ mating.



Topalov – Adams
Linares 2005

White's position looks very bad. Material is equal, but Black's pieces are perfectly centralized, while White's forces are disorganized and his king is exposed. It would be easy to panic in the face of Black's obvious initiative, but Topalov realizes that at the moment Black cannot penetrate White's defences. It is curious that even with best play Black can only secure a modest advantage.

20...g5!

A strong move, since after ...g4 Black will open the long diagonal for his bishop and secure e4 for his knight.

21 ♖f1

White cannot prevent ...g4 so he at least brings his rook into play and opens the possibility of retreating his king to the relative safety of g1.

21...g4 22 fxg4 ♕h6?

This gives away all of Black's advantage. 22...♕d5 looks natural, but then 23 ♔e1! offers good defensive chances, while 22...♘e4+ 23 ♔g1 ♘g5 24 h4 ♘e4 25 ♔h2 is another line in which White's position proves more resilient than expected.

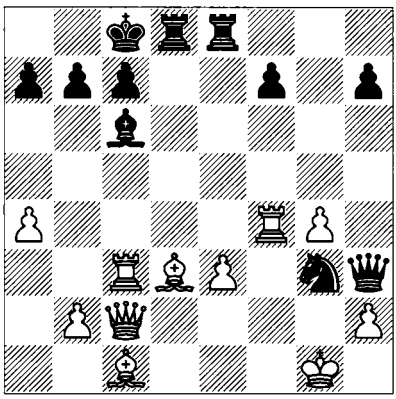
The correct approach is 22...h5! 23 gxh5 ♕h3 24 ♔e1 f5, although even here the success of Black's attack is far from assured.

23 ♔g1 ♕h3 24 ♗d3 ♘e4

24...♕xg4 25 ♖c3 is also satisfactory for White. The move played, threatening an immediate sacrifice on g3, looks very strong and it is hard to imagine that White will be able to survive with his queenside pieces out of play. However, White keeps a cool head and finds an excellent defensive plan.

25 ♖f4! ♘xg3 26 ♖c3!

Not, of course, 26 hxg3?? ♖xd3 27 ♖xd3 ♕h1+ 28 ♔f2 ♕g2+, when Black wins at once.



The move played is remarkable since, despite the accumulation of enemy pieces on the kingside, Black doesn't have a major threat, the knight in particular having nowhere useful to go. White, on the other hand, now threatens to eliminate the dangerous c6-bishop by ♖xc6 and then launch a winning attack by ♗a6+.

26...♖e6?

Taken aback by White's resourceful defence, Black panics and makes a losing mistake. The correct line is 26...♖xd3! 27 ♖xd3 ♖g8 28 e4! ♗xe4 29 ♖xg3 ♕xg3+ 30 hxg3 ♗xc2 31 ♖xf7 with a drawn ending.

27 e4!

This was White's other idea. The long diagonal is blocked, and White's queenside pieces can enter the game. The immediate threat is 28 ♗f1 followed by ♖xg3.

27...♘h5

There's no good reply. 27...♖xe4 28 ♗f1 still wins for White.

28 ♗c4

Now Black faces a decisive loss of material. He struggles on for some time, but White makes no mistake.

28...♕h4 29 ♗xe6+ fxe6 30 gxh5 ♕xh5 31 ♖d3 ♖g8+ 32 ♖g3 ♖d8 33 ♗e3 e5 34 ♖f1 h6 35 b4 a6 36 b5 axb5 37 axb5 ♗xb5 38 ♖g7 c6 39 ♕a2 ♗a6 40 ♕e6+ ♔b8 41 ♕d6+! 1-0

Pawn-Structure

Queens, rooks, bishops and knights have considerable mobility and their positions on the board can change from move to move, but pawns are different. They can only move slowly and easily become blocked, so that the pawn-structure often stays the same for a significant portion of the game. Because the pawn-formation is a long-term feature, it is often the main factor when it comes to forming a plan. For example, if White has pawns on c4, d5 and e4, and Black has pawns on c7, d6 and e5, then White's natural plan will be to aim to play c5, opening lines on the queenside, while Black usually aims for ...f5. As always in chess, such principles are not absolute and there are always exceptions, but when thinking about possible plans, the pawn-structure usually provides a clue to the correct idea.

The first few sections deal with various types of pawn-weaknesses, starting with **isolated pawns**. It's true that any sort of pawn-weakness is a handicap if all other things are equal, but in practice all other things are generally not equal. Players normally accept pawn-weaknesses only if they acquire some sort of compensating advantage, and then it's not so much a question of how weak the pawns are, as how substantial the compensation is. For the sake of simplicity, textbooks often take clear-cut examples in which the pawn-weakness is the only significant feature of the position, but in real life things tend not to be so simple. Bu Xiangzhi-Guseinov (page 166) is similar to the standard textbook examples. Black acquires an isolated f-pawn, which is not only weak in itself but also offers White an excellent square for his knight in front of the pawn. This is typical of isolated pawns, since the square in front of such a pawn cannot be attacked by neighbouring pawns, and so can provide the opponent with a useful outpost. On the other hand, A.Kovaliov-Nakamura (page 167) is a case in which Black's piece activity was allowed to develop to the point where it was far more important than his isolated pawn.

The isolated queen's pawn (usually called just IQP) is an important special case since it can arise from many different openings. In this case the isolated pawn is a potential weakness, but is often balanced by piece activity and attacking chances. Rodshtein-Zifroni (page 168) shows the bright side of the IQP, with White's attack crashing through, but Rodshtein-Yakovenko (page 169) illustrates how an IQP can prove a serious handicap if the compensating piece activity dries up.

If White has pawns on c4 and d4, but no pawns on the b- or e-files, and Black has no c- or d-pawns, then White's pawns are called **hanging pawns**. They share some similarities with isolated pawns, because they cannot be supported by friendly pawns from adjacent files, but unlike an isolated pawn, there is no safe square for the enemy pieces in front of them. This gives the pawns more dynamic potential than an isolated pawn, but they may still become weak. In particular, if a pawn exchange leads to the disappearance of one of the hanging pawns, then the other one will be isolated. Mamedov-Andreikin (page 170) shows the dark side of hanging pawns, while in Kramnik-Gelfand (page 171) Black's hanging pawns provide the springboard for a rapidly-developing initiative.

Doubled pawns are very often genuine weaknesses, but even here the situation may not be clear. In Ivanchuk-Topalov (page 172), Black's doubled pawns had both positive and negative aspects and he could have equalized, but an error led to his central pawns coming under pressure which was eventually fatal. In Perunović-Brkić (page 173), White acquired doubled and isolated pawns, supposedly the worst case, but the active play he obtained meant that the weak pawns were never an issue.

In many openings, one side surrenders the two bishops in order to inflict doubled pawns on the opponent. Once again, there is no general rule to determine whether this is a good idea. In Miyasaki-Torre (page 174), it was clearly a bad idea for White to exchange on a6, as Black obtained easy and quick development, and plenty of open lines for his pieces. Rozentalis-M.Přibyl (page 175) is an example of the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez. In this opening, White's chances have traditionally been thought to lie mainly in the endgame, but Rozentalis shows that White's extra central pawn may enable him to play for an attack in the middlegame.

Backward pawns are ones that have lagged behind friendly pawns on neighbouring files. For example, in the French Defence Black often ends up with pawns on d5 and e6, with no f-pawn, while White has a d4-pawn and no e-pawn. The e6-pawn is then backward, since it cannot advance and it cannot be defended by a friendly pawn. Backward pawns are only really a problem when they lie on a half-open file, so that the opponent can exert pressure on them along the file. In Adams-Conquest (page 176), Black's backward e-pawn left him in a purely defensive position and Adams gradually stepped up the pressure until Black cracked. Vallejo Pons-G.Jones (page 177) is a marginal case. In return for a backward pawn, Black obtained pressure against White's e4-pawn and good squares for his knight. Only a mistake allowed White to seize the initiative and exploit the pawn-weakness.

If Black has pawns on the a-, c-, d-, f-, g- and h- files then he has three **pawn-islands**, which are groups of pawns on adjacent files surrounded by files without pawns (or by the edge of the board). In this example, one island consists solely of the a-pawn, while the c- and d-pawns form a second island. The three kingside pawns constitute the third island. In general, it's better to have one's pawns grouped into as few islands as possible since with many islands it's likely that isolated or hanging pawns will arise. Potkin-Kolotilin (page 178) shows how too many pawn-islands can lead to problems. However, minor pawn-structure defects are often not too serious and Van der Sterren-Glek (page 179) shows how piece activity can easily compensate for this type of weakness.

If you have several pawns on squares of the same colour, then the squares of the opposite colour are often weak. This is called a **weak colour complex**. Such a complex can be a very serious weakness, especially if it provides the opponent with attacking chances. Shirov-Tiviakov (page 180) is an excellent example of the total grip the attacker can gain by using a bishop to control a weak colour complex. In Fedorchuk-Shirov (page 181), the weak squares are exploited by knights rather than a bishop, but the end result is much the same.

A **passed pawn** in the centre of the board can be very effective in the middlegame, since it not only threatens to advance but also keeps enemy pieces out of important squares. This seems to be one of Magnus Carlsen's favourite themes, since the examples Carlsen-Grishchuk (page 182) and Carlsen-Wang Yue (page 183) show the young Norwegian star exploiting a passed d-pawn with great energy.

In many games, one player has a **pawn-majority** on the queenside and the other a majority on the kingside or in the centre. In an endgame, if we suppose that the kings are on the kingside, then the queenside majority is often an asset, but in the middlegame this is usually not the case unless the queenside majority is coupled with some other advantage. Movsesian-Shirov (page 184) shows the power of a kingside majority when there is an attack in prospect, while in Jakubowski-Stocek (page 185) Black's central majority should have given him the advantage, but he allowed White to seize the initiative and then the queenside majority proved dominant.

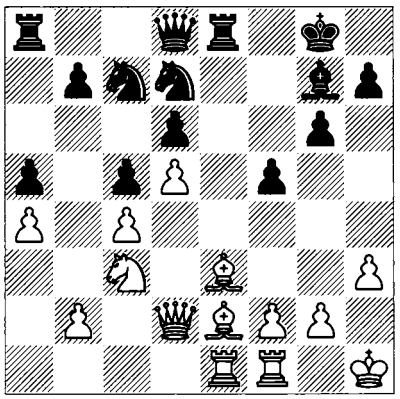
A **pawn breakthrough** involves the advance and sacrifice of one or more pawns. This often occurs in the endgame, but it is also possible in the middlegame. The motivation can be to smash through to the enemy king, as in Šolak-Lupulescu (page 186), or it can be to create one or more dangerous passed pawns, as in Sakaev-A.Fedorov (page 187).

The remaining sections in this part of the book deal with **pawn-chains**, diagonal lines of pawns in which each pawn defends the next one in the chain (for example, pawns on b2, c3, d4 and e5). Playing with pawn-chains generally involves securing your own pawn-chain while trying to undermine the opponent's. In Wang Hao-Kornev (page 188), both sides conduct undermining operations, but only White's is effective. In Gelfand-Nakamura (page 189), Black adopted a novel strategy when faced with an undermining attack on his pawn-chain. An advanced pawn-chain often results in a space advantage, which can prove decisive if there are still many pieces on the board, as in Alekseev-Riazantsev (page 190). Problems can arise if the enemy pieces penetrate behind the advanced pawns, as in Adams-Caruana (page 191), in which White's plan backfired after a mistake. Finally, pawn-chains can sometimes be demolished not by a gradual undermining process, but by an explosive sacrifice. In Predojević-Morozevich (page 192), a piece sacrifice breaks apart White's central pawn-chain and gives Black a very strong initiative, while in Elianov-Cheparinov (page 193) White is willing to invest even more material to rip open the position.

67 Isolated Pawns

A pawn is **isolated** if there are no friendly pawns on adjacent files. An isolated pawn is generally a weakness for two reasons: firstly, the pawn cannot be defended by other pawns and so has to be defended by pieces, and secondly the square in front of the isolated pawn can be occupied by an enemy piece which can never be driven away by a pawn.

W



Bu Xiangzhi – Guseinov
European Clubs Cup, Ohrid 2009

White has a slight advantage due to his two bishops, but Black's position is solid. In order to increase his advantage, White must activate the light-squared bishop, which is currently restricted by his own pawns in the centre and Black's f5-pawn on the kingside.

18 g4!

A good move, since any pawn exchange will increase the scope of the e2-bishop.

18...♘e5

18...fxg4 19 hxg4 ♘e5 20 ♔g2 ♕d7 21 ♕d1 favours White, as an eventual f4, g5 and ♗g4 will activate his bishop.

19 ♗g5

Not 19 gxf5? due to 19...♕h4.

19...♗f6 20 f4!

A surprising but good decision. The exchange on g5 will leave Black's e5-knight in a totally secure position, but it will open the f-file. If Black then exchanges on g4, White will gain a dangerous kingside attack, while if Black allows gxf5 he will end up with an isolated f-pawn.

20...♗xg5 21 fxg5 ♕d7

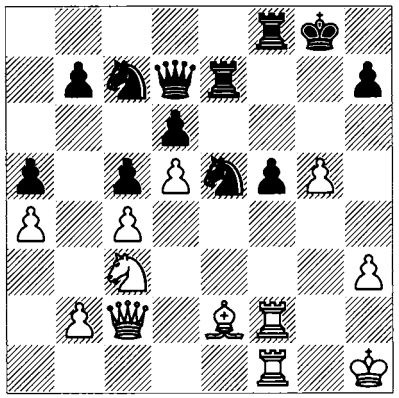
21...fxg4 22 ♘e4 gxh3 23 ♘f6+ ♔h8 24 ♘xe8 ♕xe8 25 ♖f6 ♕e7 26 ♗g4 is very good for White.

22 gxf5 gxf5

The isolated pawn appears.

23 ♖f2 ♖e7 24 ♖ef1 ♖f8 25 ♕c2

B



Stepping up the pressure on f5 effectively ties down Black's pieces.

25...♖ef7 26 ♗h5 ♘g6 27 ♘e2

Black is practically in zugzwang, and with the knight coming to g3 or f4 he faces increasing problems. He therefore decides to surrender the weak f-pawn straight away in the hope of developing a little counterplay.

27...♕e7 28 ♖xf5?!

There is no need to take the pawn at once. White can first improve his position by 28 h4 and possibly ♔h2.

28...♖xf5 29 ♖xf5 ♘h4 30 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8

Black has some counterchances as White cannot prevent a queen penetration.

31 ♕e4 ♕f2 32 ♕g4 ♘f5?

32...♕f1+ 33 ♘g1 ♘f5 34 ♕f3 ♕xf3+ 35 ♗xf3 ♔g7 36 ♗g4 ♘e3 offers better chances, although White should win in the end.

33 ♕g1!

Now White exchanges queens under much more favourable circumstances and wins easily.

33...♕xg1+

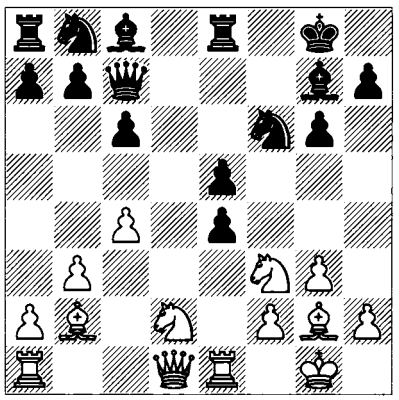
33...♕h4 loses to 34 ♗g4 ♘e7 35 ♕g3.

34 ♔xg1 ♘e3 35 b3 ♘c2 36 ♘g3 ♔f8 37 ♘f5 ♘d4 38 ♘xd6 b6 39 ♘c8 ♘xb3 40 ♘xb6 ♔e7 41 ♘c8+ ♔d8 42 ♘d6 1-0

In certain cases an isolated pawn may not be a weakness. This happens if the isolated pawn cannot easily be blockaded and the pawn has the possibility to advance. The advance and exchange of an isolated pawn can lead to a significant initiative, as the attacker then has three open or half-open files at his disposal.

A. Kovaliov – Nakamura
Montreal 2008

1 c4 f5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 b3 d6 4 d4 g6 5 ♗b2 ♗g7 6 g3 0-0 7 ♗g2 c6 8 0-0 ♕c7 9 ♘bd2 ♖e8 10 ♖e1 e5 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 e4 fxe4!?



An interesting decision, leaving Black with an isolated pawn. In previous games Black had allowed exf5, but then suffered as the pawn duo on e5 and f5 turned out to be vulnerable.

13 ♘xe4

13 ♘g5! is a safer choice, as White will end up with a knight on e4 rather than a rook, which gives him a firmer grip on the blockading square in front of the isolated pawn.

13...♘xe4 14 ♖xe4 ♗f5 15 ♖e1?!

15 ♖e3 guards the d3-square, which will be weak after a combination of ...♘a6, ...♖ad8 and ...♘c5 (or ...♘b4).

15...♘a6 16 ♘h4?!

After this White's position becomes critical. 16 ♕e2! is more flexible, since for the moment White does not commit his knight to h4 or g5. After 16...♘c5 (16...e4 17 ♘g5 puts pressure on the e4-pawn) 17 ♘h4 e4 (17...♗d3 18 ♕e3 gains an important tempo by attacking c5) 18 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 19 ♖ad1 ♘d3 20 ♖f1 Black has an active knight, but White has good defensive chances.

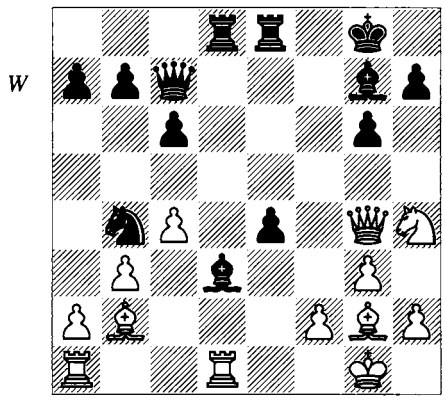
16...♖ad8 17 ♕e2 ♗d3

This version is much more favourable for Black. His bishop occupies d3, so that it remains active even after the ...e4 advance.

18 ♕g4 ♘b4 19 ♖ed1?

Now Black's initiative becomes really dangerous. 19 ♗e4! was the last chance; after 19...♗xe4 20 ♖xe4 ♘d3 21 ♗c3 ♘c5 22 ♖e2 e4 23 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 Black's active pieces and d3-outpost give him an advantage, but White is not yet lost.

19...e4!



The isolated pawn advances, securing the d3-outpost and keeping White's pieces out of f3.

20 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 21 ♗f1 e3?

Too impetuous. 21...♕f6! is very strong, intending simply ...♖f8, and if 22 ♘g2 then 22...♘c2 23 ♖ac1 ♘d4 heads for f3, the other square secured by the e-pawn.

22 ♗xd3?

Now it's all over. 22 fxe3 ♖xe3 23 c5 a5 24 ♖ac1 offers hope for White, since the bishop is now awkwardly pinned.

22...exf2+ 23 ♔xf2 ♘xd3+ 24 ♔g1

Black has a crushing attack; the isolated pawn has gone, but its exchange has left the central files wide open and White's king exposed.

24...♕b2 25 ♖f1 ♘f2 26 ♖xf2

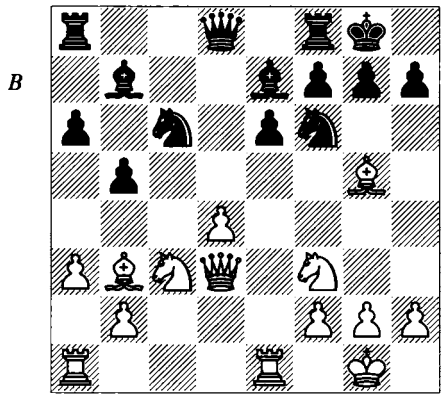
26 ♕f3 ♖f8 27 ♕g2 ♖d2 is hopeless for White, so he gives up the exchange.

26...♕xa1+ 27 ♔g2 ♕e5 28 ♔h3 ♕e6 29 ♘f5 ♔h8 30 ♘h6 ♕xg4+ 31 ♘xg4 ♔g7 32 ♖c2 ♖e4 33 ♘f2 ♖ed4 0-1

68 The IQP

Rodshtein – Zifroni
Israeli Team Ch 2007

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♗xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 ♗b3 cxd4 8 exd4 ♘c6 9 ♘c3 ♗e7 10 ♗g5 0-0 11 ♖e1 b5 12 a3 ♗b7 13 ♕d3



In isolated queen's pawn (IQP) positions like this, White's attacking chances lie mainly along the b1-h7 and a2-g8 diagonals. Here White's queen and light-squared bishop are well placed to take advantage of any such opportunities.

13...b4?!

This is risky because it drives the knight to a4, from where it may occupy c5. 13...♘a5 14 ♗c2 g6 15 ♘e5 ♖c8 or simply 13...♖c8 is safer.

14 ♘a4 bxa3 15 bxa3 ♖c8 16 ♖ad1 ♕c7

Here 16...♗xa3 is bad because of 17 ♗xe6.

17 ♖c1 ♖fd8?

Defending against the attacking prospects offered by an IQP requires constant care. Black should play 17...♗xa3! (this looks suicidal but is actually best) 18 ♗xf6 (18 ♗xe6 ♗xc1 19 ♗xc8 ♗xg5 20 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 21 ♘xg5 ♕b5 favours Black) 18...♘b4! (18...gxf6?? loses to 19 ♗c2) 19 ♖xc7 ♘xd3 20 ♖xb7 ♘xe1 21 ♘xe1 ♖b8 22 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 23 ♗c2 gxf6 and he has no problems in the ending.

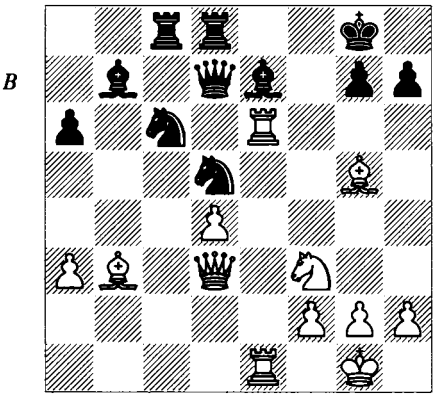
18 ♘c5

Threatening to win by 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 20 ♗xe6+ ♔h8 21 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 22 ♕c4.

18...♘d5 19 ♘xe6! fxe6 20 ♖xe6 ♕d7

Or else Black loses material immediately.

21 ♖ce1!



21...♗f8

Other moves also lose:

1) 21...♗xg5 22 ♘xg5 g6 23 ♖xg6+! (23 ♗xd5 is another way to win) 23...hxg6 24 ♕xg6+ ♕g7 25 ♖e8+! ♖xe8 26 ♗xd5+ ♔f8 27 ♕f5+ ♔e7 28 ♕e6+ ♔f8 (28...♔d8 29 ♕d6+ ♕d7 30 ♘f7#) 29 ♘h7+ ♕xh7 30 ♕f6+ ♕f7 31 ♕xf7#.

2) 21...♗f6 22 ♗c2 g6 23 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 24 ♖xf6 ♘xd4 25 ♘xd4 ♕g4 (after 25...♕xd4 26 ♗b3+ ♔h8 27 ♖e8+! ♖xe8 28 ♖f8+! White wins the queen with check) 26 g3 ♖xd4 27 ♕e3 with an extra pawn and a strong attack.

These lines demonstrate the power of White's attack along the two parallel light-squared diagonals leading towards Black's king.

22 ♗xd8?!

Missing an easier win by 22 ♗c2 g6 23 ♖xg6+! hxg6 24 ♕xg6+ ♗g7 (or 24...♕g7 25 ♕e6+ ♔h8 26 ♖e4) 25 ♗f5 ♕xf5 26 ♕xf5 with a material advantage and a continuing attack.

22...♘xd8 23 ♘g5 g6 24 ♖e8 ♔g7 25 ♕e2 ♗d6 26 ♖xd8! ♖xd8 27 ♘e6+ ♔h8?

A blunder losing straight away. 27...♔g8 is better, although after 28 ♘xd8 ♕xd8 29 ♕e8+ ♕xe8 30 ♖xe8+ ♔f7 31 ♖h8 ♔e6 32 ♖xh7 ♗e7 33 g3 White's material advantage should be enough to win in the long run.

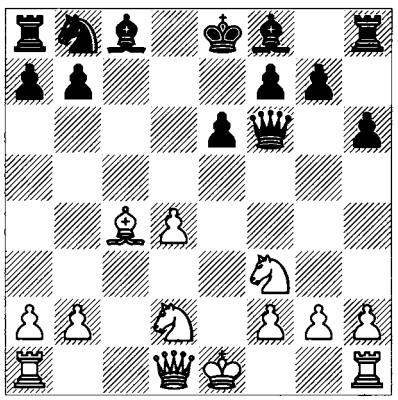
28 ♘xd8 ♕xd8 29 ♕e8+ ♕xe8 30 ♖xe8+ ♔g7 31 ♗xd5 1-0

After 31...♗xd5 32 ♖d8 White wins one of the bishops.

Rodshtein – Yakovenko
European Team Ch, Khersonissos 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♗g5 h6 5 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 6 ♘bd2 dxc4 7 e3 c5 8 ♗xc4 cxd4 9 exd4?!

A dubious decision. White has surrendered the two bishops, but in return has secured a lead in development. His hopes of an advantage lie in exploiting his better development to exert early pressure and prevent Black's pieces from coming into play. White should have continued 9 ♘xd4, followed by castling and occupying the open files with his rooks. Taking on an IQP not only creates a potential weakness but also blocks an open file that could have proved useful for White.



9...♗b4 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘e4 ♕f4 12 ♕d3 ♗d7

An IQP is a substantial weakness, especially in an endgame, but it provides attacking chances in the middlegame. White must exploit these chances, since if they come to nothing, Black will have an automatic positional advantage.

13 g3

Weakening the long diagonal looks risky, and indeed White will have cause to regret this move later, but if followed up correctly it is not bad. After 13 a3 ♗c6 14 d5 exd5 15 ♗xd5 ♖e8 Black has a completely satisfactory position.

13...♕f5 14 ♕e3?

This is not energetic enough. White should play 14 ♘e5, preparing to eliminate the bishop if it moves to c6. After 14...♗c6 15 ♘c5 ♕xd3 16 ♘cxd3 the position is roughly level.

14...♗c6 15 ♗d3 ♘d7!

White moved his queen so as to put his bishop on d3, but it turns out that the discovered attacks by the knight are harmless and Black can simply continue his development.

16 a3 ♗e7 17 ♖ac1 ♕d5

The long diagonal already looks like trouble for White.

18 ♖fe1 ♖ac8 19 h4 ♖fd8

Black's last piece comes into play and it is now obvious that he has a substantial advantage. White suffers not only from the isolated pawn, but also from the weakness of his king position. In particular, the black queen, occupying the secure square in front of the IQP, dominates the board.

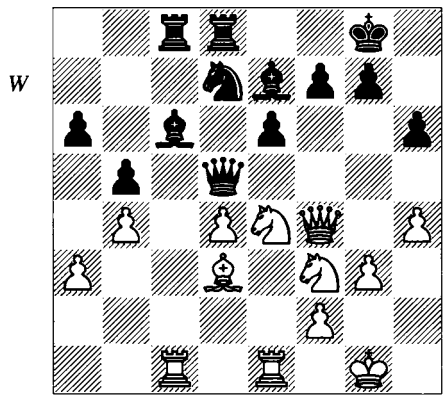
20 b4

The queen cannot be dislodged by 20 ♗c4? due to 20...♕xe4 21 ♕xe4 ♗xe4 22 ♖xe4 b5.

20...a6 21 ♕f4?

21 ♖c2, preparing to double rooks on the c-file, is a better chance.

21...b5!



Black prepares ...♗a8 to start exchanging rooks, when White's position will collapse.

22 ♖e3 ♗a8 23 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 24 ♘e5?! ♘xe5

Black can win more quickly by 24...♖c1+! 25 ♗f1 f5 26 ♘xd7 ♕xd7 27 ♘c5 ♕d5 28 f3 ♗d6, but it doesn't really matter.

25 ♕xe5 f5 26 ♕xd5 ♖c1+ 27 ♗f1 ♗xd5 28 ♘d2

After 28 ♘c3 ♗c4 29 ♘e2 ♖a1 30 ♔g2 g5 White is paralysed by the pin on his knight.

28...f4 29 ♖d3 h5 30 gxf4 ♗xh4 31 ♘b3 ♖e1 32 ♖e3 0-1

69 Hanging Pawns

If a player has pawns on the c- and d-files, but no b- or e-pawns, and the opponent has no c- or d-pawns, then these pawns are called **hanging pawns** (the same situation can occur on other files, but the c- and d-file case is the most common). They are subject to attack down the half-open files but, unlike isolated pawns, there are no weak squares immediately in front of the pawns. Hanging pawns represent a slight weakness, but often confer a space advantage and chances to play for the initiative.

Mamedov – Andreikin
Lubbock (rapid) 2009

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘d5 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 b6 7 ♘c3 ♗b7 8 ♗d3 ♘a6!? 9 0-0

9 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 10 ♗xa6 b5 11 0-0 ♕b6 12 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 is the idea behind Black's play. He has given up a pawn, but has compensation in the form of a strong grip on the light squares.

9...♘ab4 10 ♗b1 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♘d5 12 c4?!

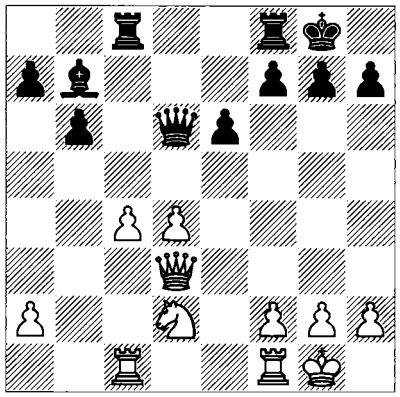
It's wrong to allow the exchange of White's important light-squared bishop. 12 ♕b3 is the critical line, avoiding any exchanges.

12...♘c3 13 ♕d3 ♘xb1 14 ♖xb1 ♖c8 15 ♗g5 ♗e7 16 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 17 ♘d2 0-0 18 ♖bc1 d6 19 exd6

The only real alternative is 19 f4 but after 19...♕d7 followed by ...♖fd8 White will be subjected to unpleasant pressure along the d-file.

19...♕xd6

W



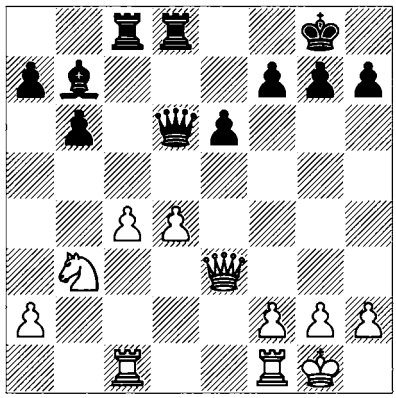
Now White has hanging pawns, but this is a very unfavourable case. With only one pair of minor pieces on the board, White has none of the attacking chances which often compensate for the weakness of such pawns. Moreover, Black's pieces are well placed to exert pressure against the pawns, for example by ...♖fd8 and ...♗a6.

20 ♘b3?!

20 ♖fd1 ♖fd8 21 ♘f1 followed by ♘e3 is better, although Black retains an advantage.

20...♖fd8 21 ♕e3

B



21...♗a6?!

Missing 21...♕c6! 22 f3 ♗a6 23 ♘d2 ♕d6, winning one of the hanging pawns straight away.

22 c5

This is the only way to avoid the immediate loss of a pawn, but when one of the hanging pawns has to advance voluntarily (it's different if Black has to provoke an advance by ...b5 or ...e5) then the remaining pawn becomes backward and the square in front of it is very weak.

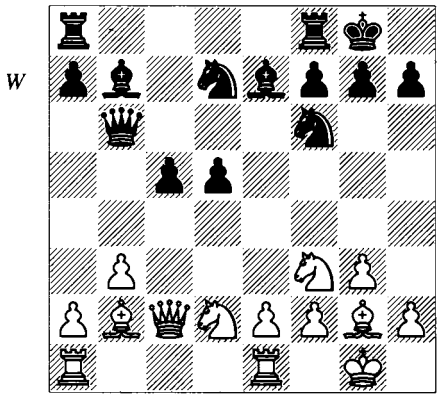
22...♕d5 23 ♖fe1 ♗c4 24 ♖ed1?

Losing a pawn. After 24 h3 h6 (24...♗xb3? 25 axb3 ♕xd4?? isn't possible due to 26 ♕xd4 ♖xd4 27 cxb6) 25 ♘d2 ♗b5 Black has a clear advantage but White can still resist.

24...bxc5 25 ♕c3

25 ♘xc5? loses to 25...♖xc5 26 dxc5 ♕xd1+, so White cannot recapture.

25...♗xb3 26 axb3 e5 27 ♕a5 exd4 28 ♕xa7 ♕xb3 29 h3 d3 30 ♖b1 ♕e6 31 ♖e1 ♕d7 32 ♖b7 d2 33 ♖d1 ♕e6 34 ♖c7 ♕e1+ 0-1



Kramnik – Gelfand
Amber Rapid, Nice 2010

This is a more balanced situation. All the minor pieces are on the board, which gives Black some attacking potential. Moreover, the owner of the hanging pawns normally controls more space, and it isn't easy for White to manoeuvre all his pieces freely within the confines of the first three ranks. Objectively, White is still slightly better, since his position currently lacks any weaknesses, but he has to beware the dynamic potential of Black's pawns.

16 ♖ad1 ♖ad8 17 ♗h3

The bishop wasn't doing much on g2 and moves to a more tempting diagonal.

17...♕c6?!

This is a tactical mistake which White could have exploited. 17...♕c7! is correct, when 18 e4 can be safely met by 18...♘xe4. It looks odd to put the queen on an undefended square, but it's more important that the queen is not exposed to an attack by the f3-knight.

18 ♖c1?!

18 e4! is good for White. Then 18...♘xe4? is not possible due to 19 ♘xe4 dxe4 20 ♖xd7! ♖xd7 21 ♘e5, while 18...d4 19 ♖c1 ♕b6 20 e5 ♘d5 21 e6 gives White a large advantage. Thus Black must play 18...dxe4, although 19 ♗g2! ♘b6 20 ♘e5 ♕e6 21 ♘xe4 favours White due to Black's broken queenside pawns. The owner of the hanging pawns must always be on the lookout for pawn-thrusts which break up the pawns.

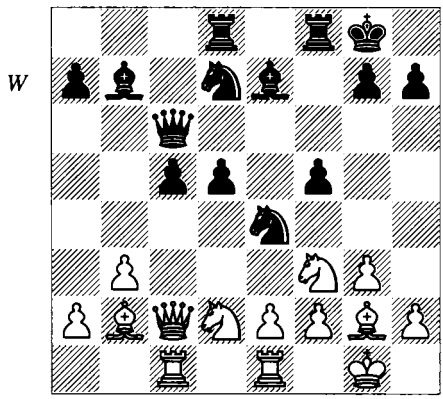
18...♘e4!?

A combative alternative to the safe 18...♖fe8, which is roughly level.

19 ♗g2?!

Too passive. 19 ♘xe4 dxe4 20 ♘d4 ♕h6 21 ♘f5 ♕xh3 22 ♘xe7+ ♔h8 is better, with an unclear position.

19...f5!



Now that Black has secured his knight on e4, he stands well.

20 b4

This move gains the d4-square for White, but Black retains the advantage thanks to his space advantage and piece activity.

20...c4 21 a3 ♗f6

Black's plan is to contest the d4-square, eventually hoping to force White to play e3, after which d3 becomes an outpost for Black.

22 ♘d4 ♕b6 23 ♘2f3 g5! 24 e3?!

Falling in with Black's plan. 24 ♖ed1 offers more resistance, since playing to win a piece by 24...c3 25 ♗xc3 ♖c8 26 ♕d3 g4 leads to unclear play after 27 ♗a1! ♖xc1 28 ♖xc1 gxf3 29 exf3 ♘d6 30 ♘xf5.

24...g4 25 ♘d2 ♘e5

Now White's rooks have to scramble out of the way.

26 ♖e2 ♗g7 27 ♖d1 ♖c8 28 ♘f1 ♘d3 29 ♗a1

White can't even give up the exchange by 29 ♖xd3 cxd3 30 ♕xd3 due to 30...♗a6.

29...♕a6 30 ♕a2 ♕a4 31 ♖c2?!

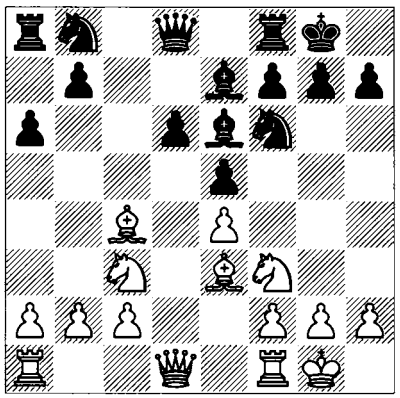
A blunder, but the position is lost in any case; for example, 31 ♖b1 ♖f7 32 ♘d2 ♘d6 33 ♘f1 ♗xd4 34 ♗xd4 ♘b5 35 ♖a1 ♘xd4 36 exd4 f4 and White collapses.

31...♘dxf2! 32 ♗xe4 fxe4 33 ♘e6 ♘xd1 34 ♗xg7 ♖xf1+ 0-1

70 Doubled Pawns

Ivanchuk – Topalov
Morelia/Linares 2007

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e5 7 ♘f3 ♗e7 8 ♗c4 0-0 9 0-0 ♗e6



10 ♗xe6!?

This move doubles Black's pawns, but it opens the f-file for Black's rook and increases Black's central control because the d5-square is now covered. Normally, these pros and cons would add up quite favourably for Black, but White has a specific idea in mind to inconvenience Black.

10...fxe6 11 ♘a4

The only move to cause Black difficulties, the point being that 11...♘bd7? is bad due to 12 ♘g5.

11...♘g4?!

Although this solves Black's immediate problems, it leads to the exchange of minor pieces. In a simplified position, Black's weak pawns will be more important than his dynamic possibilities. 11...♘fd7 is a better way to prevent ♘b6, and after 12 c4 ♘c6 13 ♖c1 ♖c8 Black has equalized.

12 ♕d3 ♘xe3 13 ♕xe3 b5 14 ♘b6 ♖a7 15 ♘d5 ♖b7

15...♖d7 is met by 16 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 17 a4, with pressure against Black's queenside. Therefore Black plays his rook to b7, so that the same line may be answered by 17...bxa4.

16 ♕d2 ♘c6?!

The knight is exposed on this square and soon has to return to b8. The best defence is 16...♗h4 17 ♘xh4 ♕xh4 18 ♘e3 ♖d8, which is very close to equality.

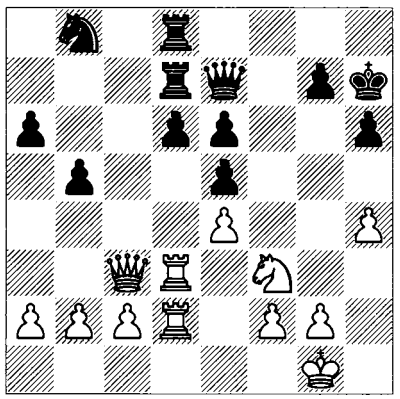
17 ♖ad1 ♖d7 18 ♕c3! ♘b8

18...exd5 19 ♕xc6 d4 20 c3 dxc3 21 ♕xc3 leaves Black with a bad bishop.

19 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 20 ♖d3

The pressure against e5 makes it almost impossible to play ...d5, so the doubled pawn has the effect of removing any dynamic potential from Black's central pawns. With an f-pawn, he could at least play for ...f5.

20...h6 21 ♖fd1 ♖fd8 22 h4 ♔h7 23 ♖1d2



White is free to manoeuvre as he likes, although he must take care not to allow Black to activate his knight.

23...♕f8 24 ♕b3 ♕e8 25 a4 ♕g6

Topalov decides to give up a pawn in order to create a little counterplay. After 25...bxa4 26 ♕xa4 Black's pieces are completely tied down to defending the weak pawns.

26 axb5 axb5 27 ♖e3 ♘a6 28 ♕xb5 ♘c5 29 ♕c4 ♖a7 30 ♖e1 ♕e8 31 b4 ♘a4 32 ♕b3 ♘b6 33 ♖ed1 ♖ad7 34 ♕d3?!

34 ♖d3 followed by b5 and c4 should be a simple technical win.

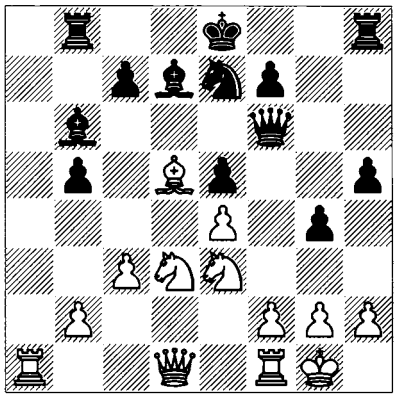
34...♖c8 35 c3 ♖a7 36 ♕e3 ♖a6 37 ♕e2 ♘c4 38 ♖a2 ♖ac6?!

38...♖xa2 39 ♕xa2 ♕c6 would still enable Black to resist.

39 ♖a7 ♖6c7 40 ♖da1 ♕f7?? 41 ♕xc4 1-0

41...♖xa7 42 ♖xa7 leaves White a piece up.

In the majority of cases, a doubled pawn is a weakness, but in some situations this weakness is simply irrelevant. The creation of a doubled pawn generally results in a file being opened, and the attacking possibilities offered by this file may outweigh the weakness of the pawns.



Perunović – Brkić
Bosnian Team Ch, Bihac 2010

19...♕g5

Black cannot exchange on e3 immediately because the f7-pawn would fall, but this move appears to threaten to take the knight.

20 c4!?

By threatening 21 c5, White forces Black to make an immediate decision about the future of the b6-bishop.

20...♗xe3?!

It's very tempting to inflict doubled isolated pawns, but this move is a mistake. The advance of Black's g-pawn has left the squares f5 and f6 weak, and the f7-pawn is already under attack from White's bishop. The attacking possibilities down the f-file outweigh the weakness of the e-pawns, and after taking on e3 Black starts to experience difficulties. 20...♗d4! is best, exploiting the square made available by the c-pawn's advance. The bishop then occupies an active central post and the position is roughly level.

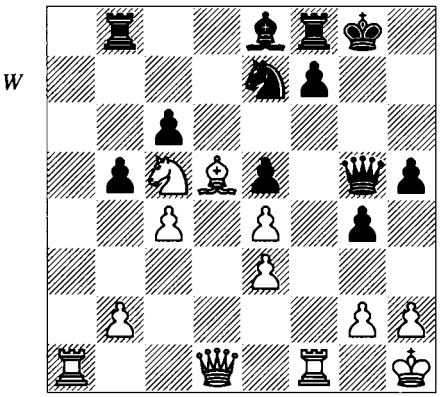
21 fxe3 0-0

21...♕xe3+ is very risky since after 22 ♔h1 ♘xd5 (22...0-0? loses to 23 ♘xe5) 23 cxd5 h4 24 ♕c1! ♕xd3 (after 24...♕xc1 25 ♖axc1 White regains the pawn while leaving Black's position riddled with weaknesses) 25 ♕xc7 0-0 26 ♕xd7 ♕xe4 27 ♖ae1 ♕g6 28 ♖xe5 Black's exposed king gives White a clear advantage.

22 ♔h1

Now that e3 is not hanging with check, White is threatening 23 ♘c5.

22...♗e8 23 ♘c5 c6



24 ♗e6!

The only move, but a good one. Of course 24...fxe6? loses to 25 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 26 ♘xe6+, winning the queen.

24...bxc4?

This allows White's bishop to stay on the a2-g8 diagonal, and the pressure against f7 soon proves decisive. 24...♘g6! is Black's only real chance, when 25 ♕d6! ♖d8 26 ♗d7 ♕xe3 27 cxb5 cxb5 28 ♕c7 ♗xd7 29 ♘xd7 leaves White with an advantage, but Black is still fighting.

25 ♗xc4

White's pawn-weaknesses play no part in the game, while his f-file pressure causes Black's position to creak at the seams.

25...♕xe3?!

This loses straight away, but even 25...♘g6 26 ♖f5 ♕e7 27 ♘d3 offers no real hope of saving the game, as White will win the h-pawn without making any concessions.

26 ♕d6

The combined attacking power of four white pieces is irresistible and soon leads to a decisive material gain.

26...♖b4 27 ♕xe7 ♖xc4 28 ♘e6 ♕h6 29 ♘xf8 ♕xf8 30 ♕g5+ ♔h7 31 ♕xh5+ ♕h6 32 ♖xf7+ 1-0

71 Two Bishops vs Doubled Pawns

In many opening lines, one side concedes the two bishops in return for inflicting doubled pawns on the opponent. Examples include the Exchange Ruy Lopez (1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗xc6 dxc6) and the Winawer French (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3). The merits of these two opening lines are still debated, but there are many situations in which the balance more clearly favours one side.

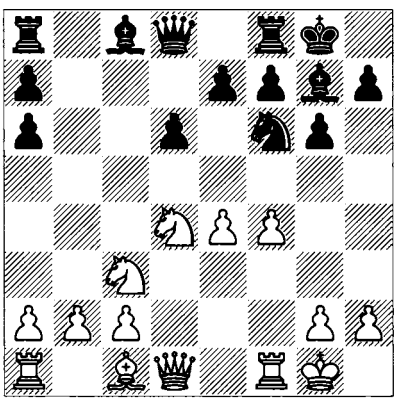
Miyasaki – Torre
Hong Kong Zonal 1972

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 f4 ♗g7 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 ♘a6 7 0-0 c5 8 ♗xa6?

This is wrong. If Black were forced to play 8...bxa6 then 9 dxc5 would be very promising for White, but Black can exchange on d4 first.

8...cxd4 9 ♘xd4 bxa6

W



White has inflicted doubled isolated pawns on Black, but he has also handed him many advantages. Black's pieces can easily come into play by ...♗b7 and ...♖c8, exerting pressure on the weakened e4-pawn, and in an open position the two bishops are a significant asset.

10 ♔h1 ♗b7 11 ♕d3 ♖c8 12 ♗e3 ♖c7!

Black hits upon a harmonious plan for developing his remaining pieces. His queen will go to a8 to step up the pressure against the e4-pawn and on the long diagonal, clearing the way for the f8-rook to move to c8. Then all his pieces will be in active positions while White's pieces are restricted to defensive duties.

13 ♖ae1 ♕a8 14 ♗g1 ♖fc8

Now an exchange sacrifice on c3 becomes a distinct possibility.

15 ♘f3 ♘h5

Attacking f4 and c3, so the knight must return. Black's bishops have developed remarkable power on the long diagonals.

16 ♘d4 f5 17 ♕h3

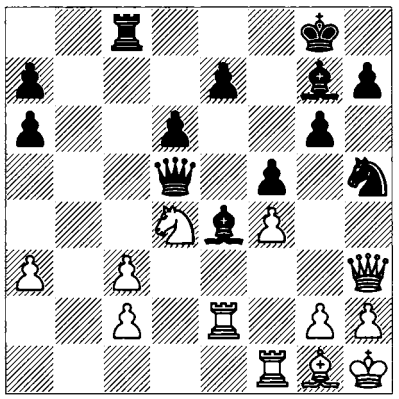
17 ♘d5 fxe4 18 ♘xc7 exd3 19 ♘xa8 ♗xd4 20 ♗xd4 ♖xc2 is also very good for Black.

17...♖xc3! 18 bxc3 ♗xe4

White is lost. Black's pieces, especially the e4-bishop, dominate the board, and it is only a matter of time before White starts losing pawns on the queenside.

19 ♖e2 ♕d5 20 a3

B



20...e5??

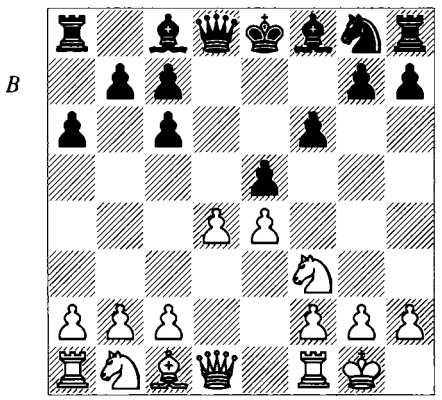
Up to here Black has played a model game and by 20...♕c4!, threatening 21...♗xd4, he could have won the c3-pawn. After 21 ♖ee1 ♕xc3 22 ♕xc3 ♖xc3 23 ♘e6 ♖xc2 Black has three pawns for the exchange and should win without difficulty. Playing ...e5 only makes sense if Black can recapture with the d6-pawn, but he cannot. The game continued **21 fxe5 ♕xe5** (21...dxe5 is met by 22 ♘xf5 ♗xf5 23 ♖xf5 gxf5 24 ♕xf5! and White has escaped) **22 ♘f3?** (missing 22 ♖xe4! ♕xe4 23 ♘xf5 gxf5 24 ♖xf5, when the undefended c8-rook means that White regains the piece with a slight advantage) **22...♘f4 23 ♘xe5 ♘xh3 24 ♘f3 ♘xg1 25 ♔xg1 ♖xc3** with some advantage for Black, who eventually won the game (0-1, 50).

Rozentalis – M. Přibyl
Liechtenstein 1995

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗xc6 dxc6

The Exchange Ruy Lopez is one of the classic two bishops vs doubled pawns battlegrounds. White usually plays d4 at some stage, and the exchange of the d4- and e5-pawns leaves each side with a pawn-majority on one wing. Traditionally, it has been held that White's chances lie mainly in an ending, in which he can create a passed pawn on the kingside while Black's crippled queenside majority cannot force a passed pawn. However, this is an oversimplification since the extra central pawn can also give White some dynamic middlegame possibilities.

5 0-0 f6 6 d4



6...♗g4

The main alternative is 6...exd4 7 ♘xd4 c5 followed by the exchange of queens. The move played, which avoids a queen swap, may appear more logical, in that the dynamic potential of the two bishops would seem better suited to middlegame play. The problem for Black is his inferior central control, which may allow White to develop an initiative. If White can start an attack, the two bishops will not be a relevant factor.

7 c3 ♗d6 8 ♗e3 ♘e7 9 ♘bd2 ♘g6 10 ♕b3 ♕c8

Defending the b7-pawn and preparing ...♗e6 to get castled.

11 dxe5 ♗e6 12 c4 ♘xe5?

12...fxe5 is sounder, keeping a foothold in the centre. Then 13 ♘g5 ♗g8 and 13 ♕c3 (threatening 14 c5) 13...c5 don't lead to any real advantage for White. Taking with a piece gives rise to a pawn-structure in which Black has no centre pawn.

13 ♘xe5 ♗xe5

13...fxe5 14 ♕c3 is now awkward for Black, as he has to meet not only 15 c5 but also 15 ♘f3.

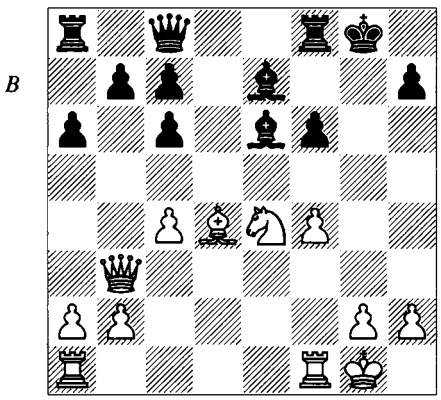
14 f4 ♗d6 15 e5

White puts his extra central pawn to use, opening lines while Black is still undeveloped.

15...♗e7 16 exf6 gxf6?!

After this the broken kingside pawns not only obstruct the e7-bishop but also leave Black's king exposed. However, the alternative is also awkward for Black, as 16...♗xf6 17 f5! ♗xf5 18 ♗c5 ♔f7 19 ♖ae1 b6 (19...♖e8 20 ♖xe8 ♔xe8 21 ♘f3 is even more dangerous) 20 ♗e7! ♗xe7 21 c5+ ♔e8 22 cxb6 ♕d7 23 b7 ♖b8 24 ♘f3 gives White good compensation for the piece.

17 ♘e4 0-0 18 ♗d4



Black has managed to castle, but White has strong pressure on the kingside which Black cannot easily relieve. This is a consequence of the doubled pawns, which give Black an extra pawn on the queenside but a pawn less on the kingside where it really matters.

18...♗f5 19 ♖fe1 ♖f7 20 c5 ♗e6 21 ♕g3+ ♔f8 22 ♕h4 ♕d8 23 ♖ad1 ♗d5 24 ♖d3?!

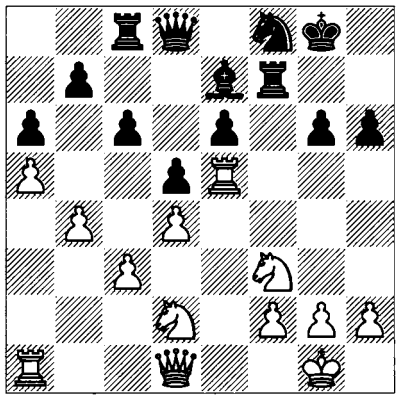
24 ♗c3! wins, since it prevents Black from relieving some of the pressure by taking on e4.

24...♔g8?

24...♗xe4 25 ♖xe4 ♕d5 26 ♕h6+ ♔e8 is still better for White, but Black's active queen gives him chances of saving the game.

25 ♖g3+ ♔h8 26 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 27 ♖e8+! ♖f8 28 ♕xf6+ 1-0

72 Backward Pawns



Adams – Conquest
British Ch, Canterbury 2010

Black's e6-pawn is a **backward pawn**, that is, a pawn which has lagged behind friendly pawns on adjacent files. It cannot be defended by neighbouring pawns, nor can it advance with the support of other pawns. The backwardness of such a pawn usually disappears if the pawn can move forward, so a backward pawn is a particular weakness if, as here, the opponent is in firm control of the square in front of the pawn. A backward pawn by itself is not usually fatal and it is interesting to see how Adams manoeuvres to increase his advantage.

20 ♖e3

A backward pawn is most effectively blockaded by a knight and so White does not delay in playing the f3-knight to e5.

20...♗d6 21 ♘e5 ♖f4?!

This allows White to increase his grip on e5. 21...♗xe5 22 ♖xe5 ♕f6, aiming for ...g5 and ...♘g6, gives Black better chances of contesting White's control of e5.

22 ♕e2 ♖c7 23 ♘df3 ♖f5 24 ♖e1

Every white piece is focused on e5.

24...♖g7 25 g3 ♗e7 26 ♔g2 ♕c8 27 ♕d2

White's plan is to force Black to play ...h5, so as to gain access to g5 for the white knights.

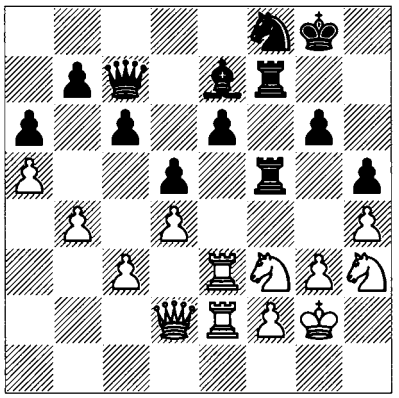
27...♔h7 28 ♖3e2 ♕d8 29 h4 h5

Black could not avoid this, since if he does not play ...h5 voluntarily, White will force it with ♘g4. Now there is a second backward pawn on g6.

30 ♘d3 ♖gf7 31 ♘fe5 ♖g7 32 ♘f4

With the immediate threat of ♘ed3, targeting e6, but also preparing an eventual ♘h3-g5.

32...♕c8 33 ♘h3 ♔g8 34 ♖e3 ♕c7 35 ♘f3 ♖gf7 36 ♖1e2



White is ready to triple major pieces with the queen on e1.

36...♖7f6

36...♕c8 puts up more resistance, although after 37 ♕e1 ♕e8 38 ♘hg5 ♗xg5 39 ♘xg5 ♖7f6 40 ♔g1 (40 ♘xe6? ♘xe6 41 ♖xe6 ♖xf2+! draws) Black loses the e-pawn in any case.

37 ♘fg5 ♕d7 38 ♕e1

Now the e-pawn is doomed.

38...♗d6 39 ♘xe6 ♘xe6 40 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 41 ♖xe6 ♔f7 42 ♖e3 ♗e7 43 ♕e2 ♗d8

White is winning, but he still has some work to do.

44 ♕d3 ♗e7 45 ♖e2 ♗f6?!

45...♔g7 46 ♕e3 ♖f7 puts up more of a fight.

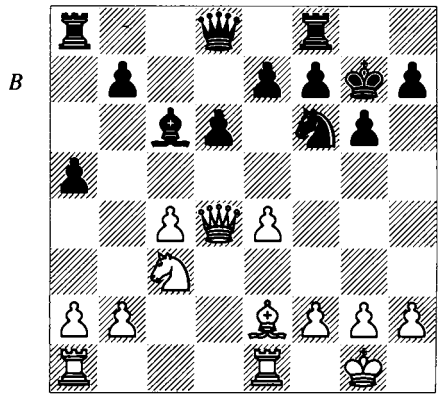
46 ♕e3 ♕e7 47 ♕d2 ♕f8 48 ♘f4 ♕c8 49 ♘h3?!

Missing an immediate win by 49 ♕e3 ♕d7 50 ♘e6 ♗g7 (or else ♕h6) 51 ♘c5 and the queen penetrates. White doesn't continue in the most efficient manner, but he wins in the end.

49...♔g7 50 ♕e3 ♕d7 51 ♕e8 ♕c7

After 51...♕xe8 52 ♖xe8 followed by ♖b8 White wins easily.

52 ♖e6 ♕f7 53 ♕c8 g5 54 ♖e2 ♔g6 55 hxg5 ♗xg5 56 ♘xg5 ♖xg5 57 ♕e6+ ♔g7 58 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 59 ♖e5 1-0



Vallejo Pons – G. Jones
European Team Ch, Khersonissos 2007

A backward pawn is not an especially serious weakness if the defender can control the square in front of the pawn to prevent it from being occupied by enemy pieces. Here White has a space advantage and to counter this Black decides to stake a claim in the centre even at the cost of a backward pawn.

16...e5! 17 ♕e3 ♘d7

Fifty years ago, such a position would have been condemned as very bad for Black, but these days we know that the potential weakness of the backward d-pawn is balanced by the inactivity of White's bishop. It is important that Black is able to cover the d5-square and has chances to activate his knight by ...♘c5-e6-d4. The position is roughly equal, if only because it is hard to find a constructive plan for White.

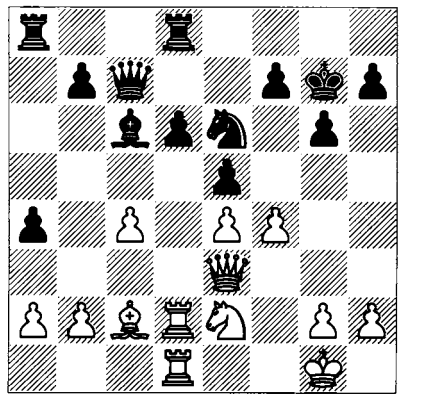
18 ♖ad1 ♘c5 19 ♖d2 ♕e7 20 ♗d1

Heading for c2. Once the e4-pawn is securely defended by the bishop, White will be free to manoeuvre with his knight. Note that a line such as 20 ♘d5 ♗xd5 21 ♖xd5 ♖fc8 22 ♖ed1 ♖c6 is never dangerous for Black as his knight is better than White's bishop.

20...a4 21 ♗c2 ♖fd8 22 ♖ed1 ♘e6 23 ♘e2 ♕c7?!

A slip, since the queen was well placed on e7 and should not have been moved away. After 23...♖a5 (23...♘c5 also leads to equality) the position remains dead level since 24 f4 ♘xf4 25 ♘xf4 exf4 26 ♕xf4 may be countered by 26...♖e5.

24 f4!



By opening the position, White can try to convert the d6-pawn into a genuine weakness.

24...♕a5?!

The wrong reaction, allowing White to gain more space on the kingside and drive the knight away from e6. 24...exf4 25 ♘xf4 ♘xf4 26 ♕xf4 ♕b6+ 27 ♖f2 ♖d7 is correct. Although it looks risky, White cannot exploit the temporarily exposed black king, since 28 e5 can be met by 28...♖e8! 29 exd6 ♖e2 30 ♕d4+ ♕xd4 31 ♖xd4 ♖e1+ 32 ♖f1 ♖e2 with a draw by repetition. Black wouldn't have had to find this difficult line if he had taken more care the previous move.

25 f5 ♕c5 26 ♔f2!

The king will be well placed on e3, where it defends the e4-pawn.

26...♕xe3+ 27 ♔xe3

The queen swap has left Black with serious problems defending his backward pawn.

27...gxf5

27...♘c5 28 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 29 ♖xd6 gxf5 30 exf5 ♗xg2 31 ♘g3 also favours White.

28 exf5 ♘c7 29 ♘c3!?

29 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 30 ♖xd6 ♗xg2 31 f6+ ♔f8 32 ♗e4 is simple and strong, but the move played is also good.

29...♔f8

After 29...♘e8 30 c5 White wins the d-pawn.

30 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 31 ♖xd6 a3 32 b4 ♗xg2 33 ♔f2 ♗h1

33...♗c6 34 b5 ♗e8 35 ♗e4 is lost for Black.

34 b5!

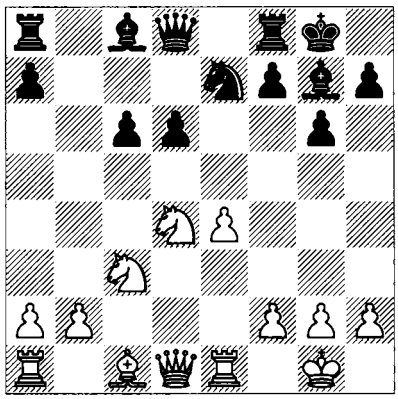
Threatening to trap the bishop by ♖d1, so Black has to start jettisoning pawns.

34...b6 35 ♖xb6 ♖d8 36 ♔e3 ♖d4 37 f6! ♖xc4 38 ♖b8+ ♘e8 39 ♘e4 1-0

73 Pawn-Islands

Potkin – Kolotilin
Russian Team Ch, Togliatti 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 g6 4 ♗xc6 bxc6 5 0-0 ♗g7 6 c3 e5 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 exd4 9 ♘xd4 ♘e7 10 ♘c3 0-0 11 ♖e1 d6



The opening has left Black with an inferior pawn-structure because his pawns are broken up into three islands as opposed to White's two. Whether this factor is significant depends on the exact details of the position. Here the pawn-duo on c6 and d6 is inflexible, since playing ...c5 leaves a backward d-pawn, while ...d5 will result in an isolated pawn. In compensation, Black has the two bishops, but the light-squared bishop is hard to activate, so on balance White is better.

12 ♗g5 ♗d7 13 ♕d2

White would like to exchange dark-squared bishops as the g7-bishop is Black's best piece.

13...♖e8

Now 14 ♗h6 can be met by 14...♗h8.

14 ♖ad1 ♕b6 15 ♘b3 ♘c8 16 ♗e3! ♕c7 17 ♗d4

Either exchanging bishops or forcing the concession ...f6, blocking in the g7-bishop.

17...f6 18 ♗e3 ♗e6 19 ♘d4 ♗f7 20 ♗h6 ♖b8

Black decides to allow the bishop swap since his bishop is no longer very active.

21 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 22 ♖e3

White has a clear advantage, since there's little Black can do about White's pressure against the d6-pawn, but the position is still far from a win. The rook-lift to the third rank enables White to combine possible threats to the kingside by ♖h3 with a tripling of the major pieces along the d-file.

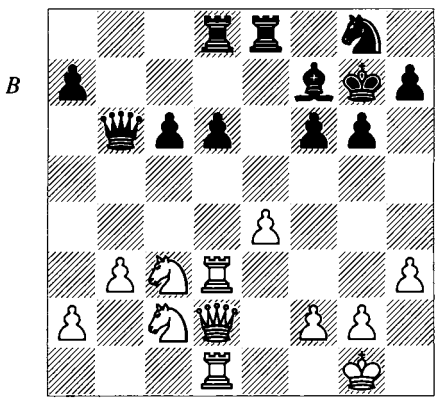
22...♘e7

Black transfers his knight to g8 since otherwise ♖h3 could only be met by ...h5, further weakening the kingside. However, on g8 the knight is unable to defend the d6-pawn. It's the familiar story of the defence being overstretched by threats on different parts of the board.

23 ♖h3 ♘g8 24 ♖g3 ♔h8 25 b3 ♖bd8 26 ♖d3

Black has never managed to solve the problem posed by his pawn-islands and now faces steadily increasing pressure along the d-file.

26...♕b6?! 27 h3 ♔g7 28 ♘c2



The d-pawn is doomed.

28...d5 29 ♘e3 ♘e7 30 ♘g4!

Winning the d-pawn while keeping a pair of knights on the board. White's knight is more active than Black's, so this simplifies the win.

30...♘g8 31 exd5 cxd5 32 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 33 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 34 ♕xd5 h5 35 ♘e3 ♕a6 36 a4 ♖e7 37 ♕c5 ♕b7 38 ♖d8 ♘h6 39 ♘d5 ♖f7 40 b4 ♕a6 41 a5 ♘f5 42 ♘f4 h4 43 ♕d5 ♕b7 44 b5

44 ♘e6+ ♔h7 45 ♕c4! wins at once.

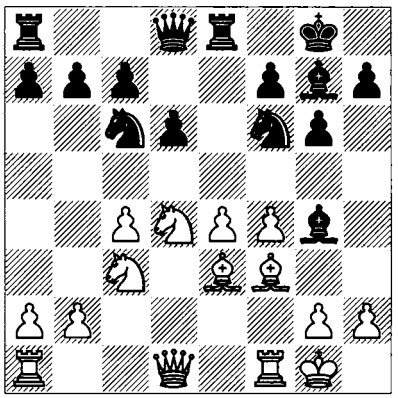
44...♕e7

44...♕xd5 45 ♘xd5 ♖b7 lasts longer, but White still wins after 46 b6 axb6 47 ♘xb6 ♘e7 48 ♖d7 ♖xd7 49 ♘xd7 ♘c6 50 a6, etc.

45 ♘e6+ ♔h7 46 b6 axb6 47 axb6 ♘g7 48 ♖d7 1-0

Van der Sterren – Glek
Bundesliga 1994/5

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 exd4 8 ♘xd4 ♖e8 9 f3 ♘c6 10 ♗e3 ♘h5 11 f4 ♘f6 12 ♗f3 ♗g4!?



White controls more space, so Black uses tactical means to force exchanges, even at the cost of some pawn-weaknesses.

13 ♘xc6 ♗xf3 14 ♕xf3 bxc6

Black now has three pawn-islands to White's two, but middlegames are a mixture of both static and dynamic factors. While White may be doing well from a purely static viewpoint, it's important to look at the piece activity on both sides. The doubled c6-pawn is actually quite useful as it covers d5, while the open b-file and long diagonal offer chances to attack b2. The c4- and e4-pawns are slightly weak, and indeed Black already threatens 15...♘xe4! 16 ♘xe4 ♕e7, winning a pawn. Black's possibilities for active play more or less balance the slight defects in his pawn-structure, and the position is roughly level. This is in sharp contrast to the previous example, in which Black was never able to develop any active piece-play.

15 ♗d2?!

15 ♖ae1 is more natural, since the obvious 15...♕b8?! 16 ♖e2 ♕b4? fails tactically after 17 e5. Instead, 15...♘d7 is approximately equal.

15...♕b8 16 b3 ♕b6+ 17 ♔h1 ♘xe4!

Black utilizes his piece activity to force a liquidation to a clearly level position. 17...♕d4? is wrong as 18 ♖ad1 ♘xe4?? 19 ♗e1! costs Black a piece.

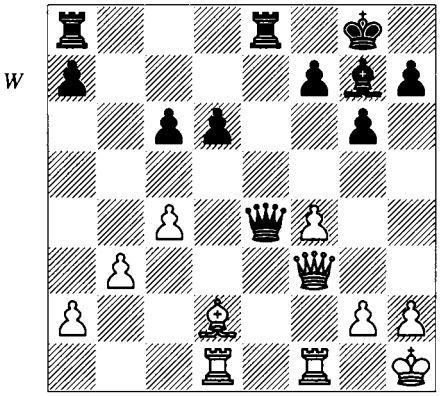
18 ♘xe4 ♕d4!

Not 18...♗xa1?, hoping for 19 ♖xa1? ♕d4, because 19 c5! wins.

19 ♘xd6

19 ♖ae1 d5! 20 cxd5 cxd5 21 ♘g5 ♕xd2 22 ♖d1 ♕e2 23 ♕xd5 ♕e7 also leads to equality, with Black's active bishop balancing the broken queenside pawns.

19...cxd6 20 ♖ad1 ♕e4



21 ♖de1?

White should play 21 ♗c3 ♕xf3 22 ♖xf3 ♖e2 23 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 with a likely draw. Even in this simplified position, Black's active rook balances his slightly weaker pawns.

21...♕xf3 22 ♖xf3 ♖xe1+ 23 ♗xe1 ♖e8 24 ♗d2 ♖e2 25 ♖d3 c5!

Preparing to play the bishop to d4, when White will not be in a position to attack Black's pawns due to the inactivity of his pieces.

26 h3

26 ♖xd6?? loses at once to 26...♗d4 27 ♗a5 ♖xa2.

26...♗d4 27 b4?

This only makes matters worse. 27 a4 ♔f8 28 ♗c3 ♗xc3 29 ♖xc3 h5 favours Black, but White still has drawing chances.

27...♔f8 28 b5 ♔e7 29 f5

29 a4 is met by 29...d5! 30 cxd5 ♔d6 31 a5 ♔xd5 32 b6 (or else ...♔c4 wins) 32...axb6 33 axb6 ♔c6, winning the b-pawn.

29...d5! 30 fxg6 hxg6 31 ♗f4

31 cxd5 ♔d6 is also hopeless for White.

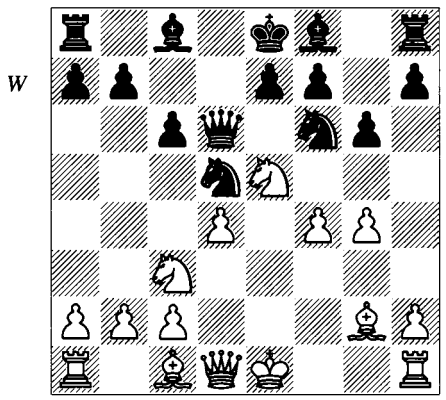
31...dxc4 32 ♖a3 ♖b2 33 ♖xa7+ ♔f6 34 h4 ♖xb5 35 ♗g5+ ♔g7 36 a4 ♖b1+ 37 ♔h2 c3 0-1

74 Weak Colour Complex

When several weak squares of the same colour link up, we have what is called a **weak colour complex**. Such complexes are usually best exploited by a bishop, as in the following example.

Shirov – Tiviakov
Hoogeveen 2010

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♕xd5 3 ♘c3 ♕d6 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 c6 6 ♘e5 ♘bd7 7 f4 ♘b6 8 g4 ♘bd5 9 ♗g2 g6



10 g5

We can already see the basis of White's dark-squared grip, but it requires a bit of cooperation from Black before it becomes really effective.

10...♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♘d5?

This allows White to push more pawns with gain of time. 11...♘d7 is correct, to exchange off the dominant e5-knight.

12 c4 ♘c7 13 c5 ♕d8

It might seem that White has overextended himself (9 pawn moves out of 13!) but the following surprising move makes it clear that Black is in trouble.

14 d5!! cxd5

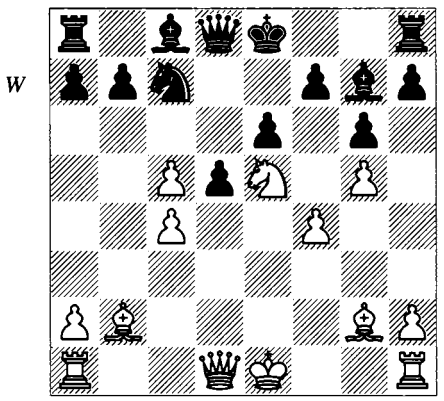
14...♘xd5 15 c4 f6 (15...♘b4 16 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 17 ♖b1 wins material) 16 cxd5 fxe5 17 ♕a4 is even more unpleasant for Black.

15 c4

Both 15...dxc4?? and 15...d4?? fail to 16 ♕a4+ ♗d7 17 c6 bxc6 18 ♗xc6, so Black has the choice between simply allowing White to play cxd5, when he obviously has an excellent position, or supporting the d5-pawn with ...e6. The problem with the latter course is that it blocks in the c8-bishop and weakens the dark squares.

15...e6 16 ♗b2 ♗g7

16...♗xc5? 17 ♘d3, 16...♗e7 17 ♕a4+ ♔f8 18 c6 and 16...♖g8 17 ♘g4 also look miserable for Black.



17 ♘c6!

A good choice, since the capture of the g7-bishop will increase White's dark-squared grip.

17...bxc6 18 ♗xg7 ♖g8 19 ♗e5

White's dark-squared bishop dominates the board, since e5, d6 and f6 are all weak, while Black's minor pieces are completely ineffective. This position provides a good example of what we mean by a weak colour complex. Black's extra pawn is meaningless in such a position.

19...♗d7

Black can't even free his bishop by 19...♗a6 due to 20 ♕a4.

20 0-0 ♖b8 21 ♕a4

The game is over. White has a total grip on the dark squares and Black has no play at all.

21...♖b7 22 ♖ab1 ♕c8 23 ♖xb7 ♕xb7 24 ♖f2

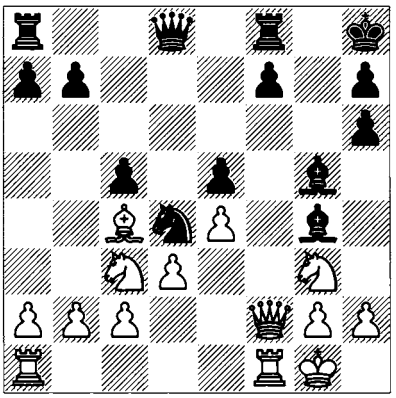
This rook is heading to b2 to penetrate down the b-file.

24...d4 25 ♕a5 ♔d8 26 ♗e4 1-0

White could have won at once by playing 26 ♖b2, but of course it makes no difference if he delays the final blow since Black cannot escape from the net.

Weak colour complexes can also be exploited by pieces other than a bishop. In the following example, practically all White's pieces get a choice to enjoy Black's weak light squares.

W



Fedorchuk – Shirov
Bundesliga 2008/9

Black suffers from an obvious weak square at d5, but thanks to his broken kingside pawns the f5-square is also weak. White's position has no real weaknesses so we can conclude that White has a significant advantage. It is true that Black has the two bishops, but his dark-squared bishop lacks activity and in any case one can hardly say that a knight on d5 will be any weaker than a bishop.

16 ♘f5

At once occupying one weak square, and also preventing any possible activity based on ...f5.

16...♖c8 17 a4

White's strategy is based on increasing his light-squared grip while taking care not to allow unnecessary counterplay. He is intending to play ♘d5, but first he rules out the reply ...b5.

17...♖c6 18 ♘d5 ♗xf5

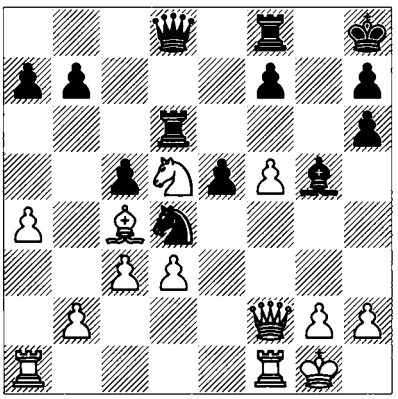
An unwelcome necessity, since the exchange of his light-squared bishop means that Black will be unable to offer even a token resistance on the light squares. However, the pair of knights on d5 and f5 were so strong that one of them had to be exchanged. 18...♘xf5 is out of the question as 19 exf5 leaves the g4-bishop in danger of being trapped.

19 exf5 ♖d6

If only Black could drive the knight away from d5 then he would be able to continue with ...♖f6, securing at least equality, but he is just too late.

20 c3

B



20...♘c6?!

20...♖xd5 21 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 22 cxd4 cxd4 puts up more resistance, but is also hopeless in the long run. Although the outpost at e3 offers some compensation, White will eventually be able to make his extra material count.

21 ♕xc5

White wins a pawn while retaining his positional advantage.

21...b6 22 ♕a3

Black cannot take on d5 since his f8-rook is hanging, so White has time to reinforce the d5-knight.

22...♖g8 23 ♕a2 h5 24 ♖ae1 f6 25 b4 ♖g7 26 ♖e4

White's pieces naturally gravitate to the weak light squares.

26...♖gd7 27 ♗b5

Taking on d5 loses the exchange, so this little trick enables White to support his knight with c4. White's whole strategy has revolved around this knight and it will also deliver the final blow.

27...h4 28 c4 ♖g7 29 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 30 ♕e2 ♖c8 31 d4

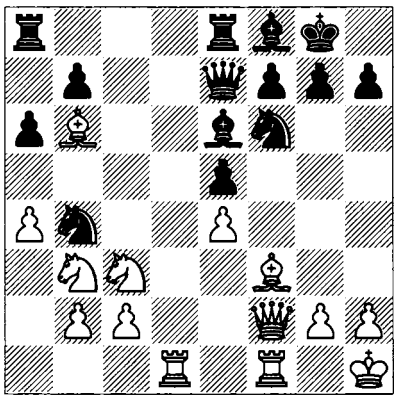
The exchange of the e5-pawn gives White access to yet another weak light square: e6.

31...exd4 32 ♖xd4 ♕e8 33 ♕e6 ♖d8 34 ♖e1 ♕xa4

This loses material, but the position was hopeless in any case.

35 ♘xb6 1-0

75 The Central Passed Pawn



Carlsen – Grishchuk
Linares 2009

20 ♘d5!

A good decision, creating a powerful passed d-pawn. A central passed pawn is often very strong in the middlegame, as it controls important squares and thereby disturbs the opponent's piece coordination. In favourable circumstances it can advance with gain of tempo by attacking enemy pieces. In an endgame, a central passed pawn is often less effective because it can be blockaded by the enemy king.

20...♗xd5 21 exd5 e4

Black too has a central passed pawn, but White's is more effective because the b6-bishop is well placed to support it.

22 d6 ♕e6?

It is wrong to allow the knight to reach c5 with gain of tempo. 22...♕e5 is stronger, and after 23 d7 ♘xd7 24 ♖xd7 exf3 25 ♕xf3 f6 (25...♖e7 26 ♕xb7 is also slightly better for White) 26 ♘d4 ♕e4 27 ♕xe4 ♖xe4 28 ♖xb7 ♖c8 White has only an edge. In this line the passed pawns have vanished, which favours Black as White's pawn is definitely more dangerous.

23 ♘c5 ♕f5 24 ♗e2 ♕xf2 25 ♖xf2

The queens have been exchanged, but Black's pawn is now blockaded by the e2-bishop while White's is already threatening to advance.

25...♘bd5

25...♘fd5 26 d7 ♘xb6 27 dxe8♕ ♖xe8 28 ♘d7 is also very promising for White.

26 a5?

Even Carlsen slips up from time to time. Anish Giri pointed out that 26 ♖xf6! is correct, since after 26...♘xf6 (26...♘xb6 27 ♖ff1 ♖ec8 28 b4 is also very bad for Black) 27 a5 Black is virtually paralysed and White can steadily improve his position by b4, c4, ♔g1, etc., before finally cashing in the d-pawn. This line demonstrates that the power of a central passed pawn lies not only in the threat of promotion, but also in the way it can work with other pieces to deny the enemy forces any useful squares.

26...♘xb6 27 axb6 ♖ab8?

This mistake allows the d-pawn to decide the game. 27...♖ec8! gives Black some chances of saving the game, although even here 28 b4! ♖c6 29 d7 ♗xc5 30 d8♕+ ♖xd8 31 ♖xd8+ ♗f8 32 ♗xa6 ♖xb6 33 ♗c4 ♖xb4 34 ♗b3 offers White some advantage.

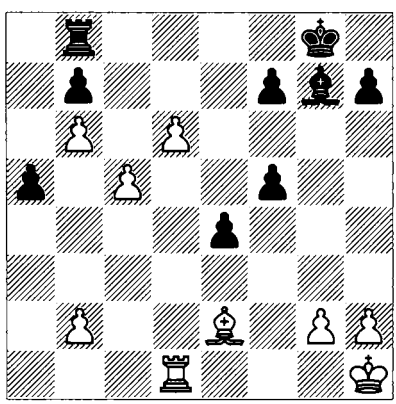
28 ♖xf6!

This liquidation enhances White's advantage.

28...gxf6 29 ♘d7 f5 30 c4

The d-pawn by itself will not be decisive, as it can be blockaded on d8, so White puts his other pawns to use.

30...a5 31 c5 ♗g7 32 ♘xb8 ♖xb8



33 ♗a6!!

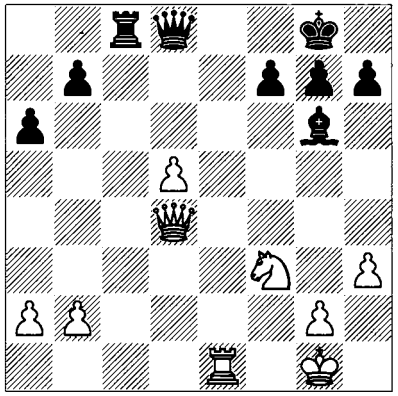
A beautiful finish, which secures three connected passed pawns for White.

33...♗f6 34 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 35 c6 ♖xb6 36 ♖c1

The only move, but one which leaves Black defenceless.

36...♗xb2 37 d7 1-0

B



Carlsen – Wang Yue
Medias 2010

This is a more balanced situation. White has a central passed pawn, but Black can blockade it, at least for the moment, and if the pawn becomes stuck, it may even prove to be a weakness. It's interesting to see how Carlsen, by exploiting his opponent's slight inaccuracies, manages to edge the pawn forward.

24...♕d6

A good move, preventing the immediate advance of the pawn.

25 ♘e5

Intending a later ♘c4. If Black plays ...b5 at any point, then the c6-square is weakened.

25...♖e8

It's usually better for the defender to clarify the position if possible. Here 25...f6 26 ♘xg6 (26 ♘c4? loses to 26...♕b4 27 ♖c1 b5) 26...hxg6 27 ♖e6 ♖c1+ 28 ♔f2 ♖c2+ 29 ♔f3 ♕d7 is a good plan. After 30 ♔g3 g5 31 ♔h2 ♔f7 White can't advance his pawn while the rook is on e6, but if it retreats then ...♕d6+ is possible. 32 ♖b6 ♖c6! 33 ♖xc6 bxc6 34 d6 a5 followed by ...♔e6 is a simple draw.

26 ♖e3

Now ♘c4 is again a threat, and this time proves more awkward.

26...♖d8

Best, as 26...b5?! 27 ♘c4! ♕d8 28 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 29 ♘e5 followed by d6 is very unpleasant for Black.

27 ♘c4 ♕f6 28 ♖e5 h6?

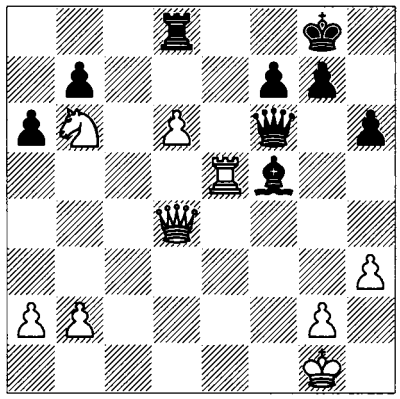
A significant mistake, allowing the pawn to advance. After 28...b5 29 ♘a5 h6 Black can still hold the game.

29 d6 ♗f5

29...b5 30 d7! ♔h7 31 ♘b6 is clearly better for White.

30 ♘b6!

B



30...♗e6

30...♕xd6?? loses at once to 31 ♖d5, while 30...♖xd6? 31 ♘d5 costs Black the exchange, since 31...♕g5 loses to 32 ♖xf5.

31 d7

The pawn is only one step from promotion. Although White cannot force it home, it severely restricts the mobility of Black's pieces.

31...♔h8 32 a4 g6 33 ♕c3 ♔g7 34 a5 h5 35 h4 ♖xd7

Not 35...♗xd7? 36 ♖d5, when Black loses his bishop. If Black waits with 35...♔g8, then 36 ♕d4 ♔g7 37 ♔h2 ♗g4 38 ♔g3 ♗f5 39 ♕c3 ♗e6 40 ♖c5 ♕xc3+ 41 ♖xc3 followed by ♖c7 should be winning for White.

36 ♘xd7 ♗xd7

While this may not be a forced win, Black is certainly struggling.

37 ♕d4 ♗c6 38 b4 ♗b5 39 ♔h2 ♗a4 40 ♖d5 ♗c6 41 ♕xf6+ ♔xf6 42 ♖c5 ♔e6 43 ♔g3 f6 44 ♔f2 ♗d5 45 g3 g5?

It is better to wait with 45...♗c6. White can probably win, but he must still work hard for the point.

46 g4!

The passed h-pawn proves decisive.

46...hxg4 47 h5 ♗e4 48 ♖c7 f5 49 h6 f4 50 h7 g3+ 51 ♔e1 f3 52 h8♕ f2+ 53 ♔e2 ♗d3+ 54 ♔e3 1-0

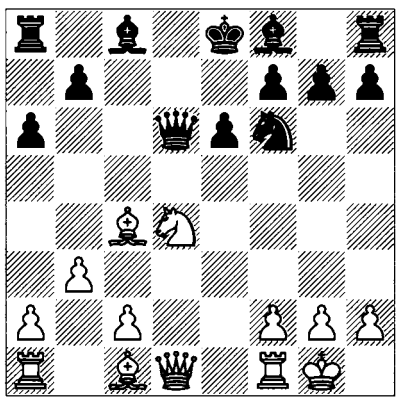
After 54...f1♕ 55 ♕e8+ ♔f5 56 ♕d7+ White mates quickly.

76 Queenside and Kingside Majorities

As the introductory essay 'Myths of the Middlegame' explains, there is no subject so misunderstood as that of the queenside majority. Many books portray such a majority as conferring an automatic advantage. This is not true; in the middlegame, **a queenside majority unsupported by any other asset confers no advantage**. The point is that a queenside majority for one side must be balanced by a central or kingside majority for the other side, and in the middlegame such a majority is often more effective.

Movsesian – Shirov
European Clubs Cup, Plovdiv 2010

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 ♘gf3 cxd4 6 ♗c4 ♕d6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♘b3 ♘c6 9 ♘bxd4 ♘xd4 10 ♘xd4 a6 11 b3



This opening line gives White a queenside majority, but he does not automatically secure an advantage as a result. If Black gains the initiative, then the extra central control afforded by his e-pawn may prove more important.

11...e5!?

An interesting innovation, instead of the more common 11...♕c7. Black intends to put his extra central pawn to use straight away.

12 ♘f3?!

12 ♖e1 ♗e7 13 ♘f3 ♕xd1 14 ♖xd1 b5 15 ♗e2 e4 16 ♘d4 looks better, although White cannot count on more than an edge.

12...b5 13 ♗e2 e4 14 ♘d4?!

14 ♕xd6 ♗xd6 15 ♘d4 0-0 is only equal, but this is safer than retaining the queens.

14...♗e7 15 ♗b2 0-0

White's queenside majority will only be of use in an endgame, while Black's e4-pawn is able to help in a direct attack on the white king.

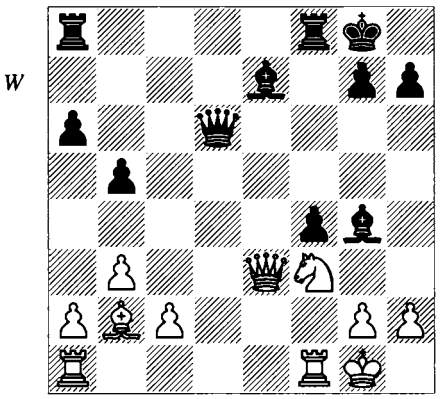
16 ♕d2 ♘g4 17 ♗xg4

17 g3 ♗f6 is an awkward pin, but giving Black the two bishops is also unattractive.

17...♗xg4 18 ♕e3 f5!

The kingside majority advances.

19 f3 exf3 20 ♘xf3 f4



21 ♕f2?!

21 ♕d4 is better, trying to bail out into an ending before White's position worsens.

21...♖ac8

Ironically, White's queenside majority even turns out to be a handicap since the c2-pawn is backward and exposed to attack along the c-file.

22 ♔h1 ♕c5 23 ♘d4

Exchanging queens doesn't help in this position; e.g., 23 ♕xc5 ♗xc5 24 ♘e5 ♗e6 25 ♖ad1 ♗e3 26 c4 bxc4 27 ♘xc4 ♗xc4 28 bxc4 h6! leaves White with no way to save his c-pawn.

23...♕h5

Playing for a direct attack; the immediate threat is ...♗h4-g3.

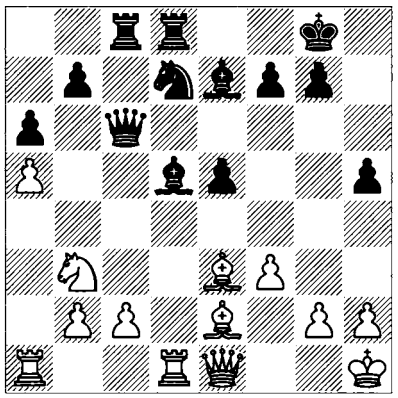
24 ♕d2 ♖cd8 25 ♔g1 f3 26 g3 ♗c5 27 b4 ♗xb4! 28 ♕f2

28 ♕xb4 f2+ 29 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 30 ♔xf2 ♕xh2+ leads to a quick mate.

28...♗c5 29 c3 ♖de8 30 ♖fe1 ♖e2! 31 ♖xe2 fxe2 32 ♕e3 ♕h3 0-1

The next position also features the struggle of a queenside majority against the extra e-pawn (see Anand-Svidler on page 55 for another example). It demonstrates how in marginal cases even an apparently small mistake can have dire consequences.

W



Jakubowski – Stocek
Pardubice 2006

White has a queenside majority, but it is actually Black who is better. The extra central pawn on e5 controls important squares, and the kingside majority might form the basis of an attack if Black can push the h-pawn further. Over the next few moves, the struggle revolves around whether White can activate his queenside majority. If he can achieve this, then the tables could easily be turned.

19 ♗d3

Defending c2, and preparing ♘d2 followed by c4. 19 c4? at once is impossible due to 19...♗xc4 20 ♖ac1 ♕b5.

19...♕e6 20 ♘d2 ♘c5 21 ♗f1

Now White intends b4 followed by c4.

21...♕c6?

A serious mistake, allowing White to advance his queenside pawns with gain of time. 21...♗c6! is correct, so that c4 does not come with tempo. Then both 22 c4 ♘a4 23 ♖ab1 ♕g6 and 22 b4 ♘a4 are very good for Black, so White cannot for the moment advance his pawns. This gives Black time to improve his position with, for example, ...♕f5, awkwardly attacking the c2-pawn. This line shows again how the extra queenside pawn can actually be a handicap if the pawns are immobile, as it lies on a half-open file and is therefore subject to attack.

22 b4 ♘d7

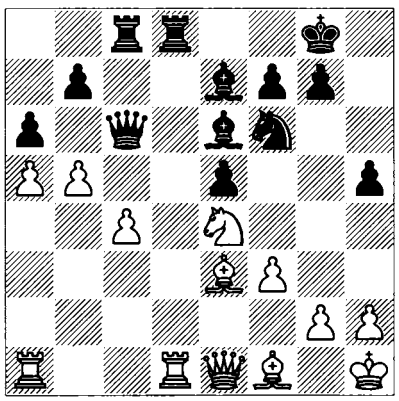
After 22...♘a4? 23 c4 ♗e6 24 b5 axb5 25 cxb5 ♕c2 26 ♖dc1 ♕b2 27 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 28 a6 bxa6 29 bxa6 the queenside majority has produced a deadly passed pawn.

23 c4 ♗e6 24 ♘e4 ♘f6?

This second error allows White's queenside pawns to push further forward. 24...♗xc4? is also bad due to 25 ♖ac1 ♕b5 26 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 27 ♘d6 ♗xd6 28 ♖xc4 ♕xc4 29 ♖xd6, when the pin along the d-file will cost Black material. The correct line is 24...♗f5! (clearing the way for the queen) 25 ♗d3 ♕g6, when White's pawns cannot advance with tempo, and the position is roughly level.

25 b5

B



25...♕e8

Unfortunately, this is the only square.

26 ♖xd8 ♕xd8 27 ♗b6 ♕d7 28 ♖d1 ♕e8 29 ♘xf6+ ♗xf6 30 bxa6 bxa6 31 c5

White's majority has been transformed into a dangerous passed pawn and, moreover, the a6-pawn is weak. The game is decided.

31...♖a8 32 ♕e4 g6

32...♗d7 loses to 33 ♖xd7.

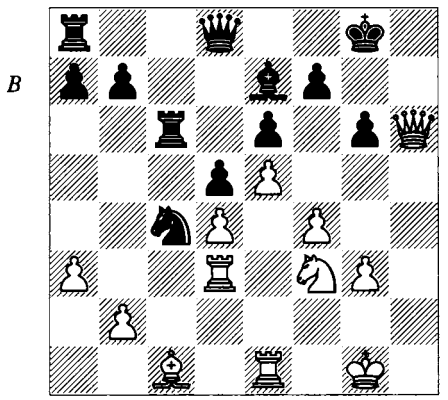
33 ♗c4

33 c6 is quicker, but the route chosen by White is just as effective.

33...♗f5 34 ♕b7 ♗e7 35 ♗xa6 e4 36 fxe4 ♗g4 37 ♖f1 ♗e6 38 c6 ♗d6 39 c7 h4 40 ♖c1 ♖c8 41 ♕c6 ♕e7 42 ♖d1 ♗e5 43 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 44 ♖d8+ ♔h7 45 ♖xc8 h3 46 ♖h8+ ♗xh8 47 c8♕ hxg2+ 48 ♔xg2 ♕g5+ 49 ♔f3 1-0

77 Pawn Breakthrough

A pawn breakthrough occurs when a pawn advances and sacrifices itself for some positive end, such as opening lines or allowing a hitherto inactive piece to enter the game. Although the pawn breakthrough is a positional concept, in practice many such breakthroughs are linked to an attack against the enemy king.



Šolak – Lupulescu
European Team Ch, Gothenburg 2005

White clearly has some attacking chances along the h-file. However, there are no instant threats; his rooks cannot immediately reach the h-file, and his other pieces are not cooperating with the queen. Moreover, White has some positional problems: his bishop is bad, being blocked in by a dark-square pawn-chain, and Black is well on the way to doubling rooks on the c-file and penetrating into White's position. Objectively, Black is better, but he mustn't underestimate White's attacking possibilities.

25...♖ac8?

This careless move allows White a tactical possibility. 25...♕f8 26 ♕h3 ♕g7 is better, securing the kingside before playing ...♖ac8.

26 f5!

White takes his chance and now his attack is at any rate enough for a draw. The pawn breakthrough has various benefits: firstly, it allows the hitherto inactive bishop to join in the attack, and secondly it loosens Black's solid pawn-structure, creating further attacking opportunities in the future.

26...♗f8?

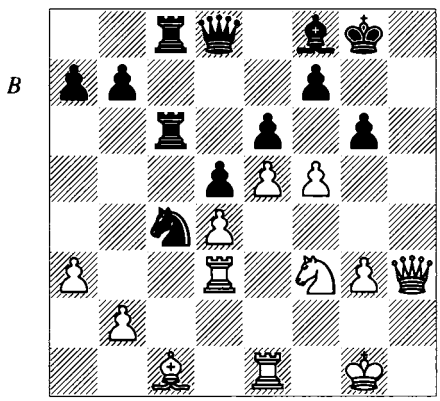
The wrong reaction, as now White's pieces can easily occupy g5. The alternatives are:

1) 26...exf5?! 27 ♘g5 ♗xg5 28 ♗xg5 ♕f8 29 ♕h4 ♕g7 30 ♖e2 ♕h7 31 ♕f4 f6 32 exf6 ♕h5 33 ♖h2 ♕g4 34 ♖h6 with a favourable ending for White.

2) 26...gxf5?! 27 ♘g5 ♗xg5 28 ♗xg5 ♕f8 29 ♕h4 ♕g7 30 g4 ♕h7 31 ♕xh7+ ♔xh7 32 gxf5 exf5 33 ♖h3+ ♔g7 34 ♔f2 ♖g6 35 ♖h5! followed by ♖eh1 with a very dangerous attack.

3) 26...♕f8 27 ♕h3 ♘xe5! 28 ♗h6 ♘xd3 29 ♗xf8 ♘xe1 30 ♗xe7 ♘xf3+ 31 ♔f2 ♘d2 32 fxg6 ♘e4+ 33 ♔f3 fxg6 34 ♕h6 ♔f7 and perpetual check is the most likely outcome; for example, 35 ♕h7+ ♔e8 36 ♗h4 g5 37 ♕g8+ ♔e7 38 ♕g7+ ♔d6 39 ♕e5+, etc.

27 ♕h3



27...exf5?!

This loses at once, but even 27...gxf5 28 ♗g5! ♗e7 29 ♕h4 ♗xg5 30 ♘xg5 ♔f8 31 ♕h5 ♖8c7 (31...♖6c7 32 g4 fxg4 33 ♖f1 gives White a winning attack) 32 g4 is extremely unpleasant for Black. Note how the breakthrough with f5 gives White the chance to open further lines by playing g4 later.

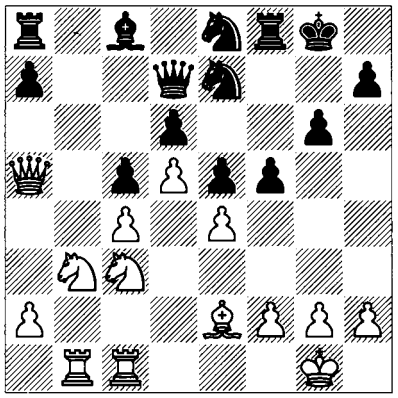
28 ♘g5 ♗g7 29 e6!

The loosening effect of White's pawn breakthrough again gives him the opportunity to open more lines. Black is defenceless.

29...fxe6 30 ♕h7+ ♔f8 31 ♘xe6+ ♖xe6 32 ♖xe6 ♕d7

32...♖c6 33 ♕xg6 also wins easily for White.

33 ♖f6+! 1-0



Sakaev – A. Fedorov
European Ch, Warsaw 2005

In this King's Indian position, Black has achieved the generally desirable exchange of dark-squared bishops, but this has had the effect of leaving his position slightly fragile, since bad bishops are often useful defensive pieces. White can exploit the looseness of Black's position by means of a pawn breakthrough.

17 f4!

A spectacular move, ripping apart Black's central pawn-structure.

17...exf4 18 e5!

Undermining the key c5-pawn, the capture of which will give White a pair of central passed pawns.

18...dxe5 19 ♘xc5 ♕d6 20 ♘b3 e4

Black tries to make use of his own pawns, but they pose little danger because they aren't supported by his pieces. Playing more passively with 20...♘f6 21 c5 ♕d8 is also bad in view of 22 ♗c4! since then 22...♘fxd5? loses material to 23 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 24 ♖d1 ♗e6 25 ♕b5! followed by 26 ♕c6 or 26 c6.

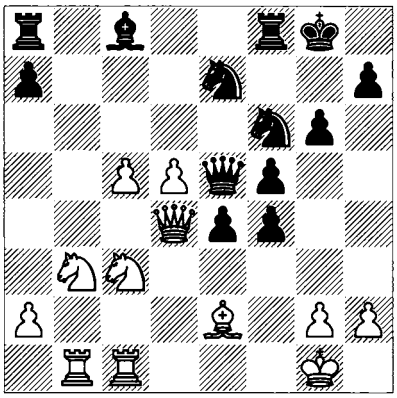
21 c5 ♕e5 22 ♕a4

Preventing ...♘c6 as a reply to d6, and also threatening simply 23 ♕d4, since in an ending the connected passed pawns would be crushing.

22...♘f6?

Black needs to take drastic action to avoid being steamrollered by the pawns. He had to try 22...f3!? 23 gxf3 exf3 24 ♗xf3 ♕e3+ 25 ♔g2 f4. White is still better after 26 ♕e4, but at least 26...♘f5 gives Black some chances for counterplay on the kingside.

23 ♕d4!



Now Black is lost, since there's no reasonable way to avoid the queen exchange.

23...♘d7

23...♘g4 24 h3 ♕xd4+ 25 ♘xd4 ♘e5 26 d6 ♘7c6 27 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 28 ♗c4+ ♔h8 29 ♘d5 ♗d7 30 ♘xf4 is also winning for White.

24 c6?

Missing a forced win by 24 ♗b5!, threatening both 25 d6 and 25 ♗xd7, when Black cannot avoid disaster.

24...♕xd4+ 25 ♘xd4 ♘e5 26 c7

White is still winning, although it now requires a little work.

26...♗d7 27 ♗b5 ♗xb5 28 ♖xb5 a6 29 ♖b6 ♘c8

White also wins after 29...♔f7 30 ♘e6 ♖fc8 31 ♘g5+ ♔e8 32 d6 ♘d7 33 ♖bb1 ♘g8 34 ♘d5.

30 ♖e6 ♘d3 31 ♖b1!

With the twin threats of 32 ♖b8 and 32 d6, so Black is forced to surrender a piece. It's interesting how White's pawns have advanced without much resistance, while Black's pawns are still where they were 10 moves ago.

31...♖a7 32 d6 ♘xd6 33 ♖xd6 ♖xc7 34 ♘d5

Although Black has three pawns for the piece, White's pieces are so active that he has no trouble winning.

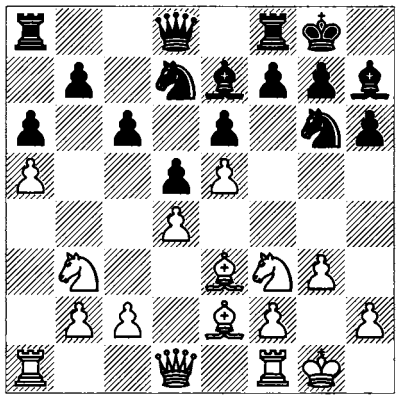
34...♖c4?!

A blunder, but even Black's best defence 34...♖a7 35 h4! ♘e5 36 ♘f6+ ♔h8 37 ♘e6 ♖c8 38 ♖db6 is hopeless.

35 ♘e6 ♖a8 36 ♖d7 1-0

Threatening 37 ♘f6+, and forcing mate in a few moves.

78 Pawn-Chains



Wang Hao – Kornev
Russian Team Ch, Dagomys 2008

This is a typical position with central pawn-chains. White's chain consists of the pawns on d4 and e5, while Black's chain is formed by the pawns on d5, e6 and f7. White's pawns are more advanced, so he controls more space. The side with the more advanced pawn-chain generally has an automatic advantage based on the extra space, at least while there are still many pieces on the board. However, this advantage only applies when the pawn-chain is secure; if it can be undermined by enemy pawn advances then any latent advantage may well disappear. The traditional theory of pawn-chains is that they should be attacked at the base rather than the head, but this 'rule' has so many exceptions that it can be disregarded. Here the traditional theory implies that White should play f4, g4 and f5 to attack e6, but only a brave man would advance so many pawns in front of his own king. Instead, White successfully ignores traditional pawn-chain theory and plays to exploit his space advantage.

13 ♘e1

Planning to meet ...f6 with f4, maintaining the pawn-chain.

13...c5

Black attacks the base of White's pawn-chain, but it's easy for White to support d4.

14 c3 c4

It's clear that attacking the securely defended d4-pawn won't help Black, and a general queenside pawn advance by ...b5-b4 is impossible thanks to the pawn on a5, so Black extends his pawn-chain.

15 ♘d2 ♘b8 16 h4! ♘c6 17 h5 ♘h8 18 ♕a4?!

The immediate attack on the head of Black's pawn-chain is more effective: 18 b3! ♘xa5 19 bxc4 ♘xc4 20 ♘xc4 dxc4 21 ♗xc4 ♖c8 22 ♗d3 ♖xc3 23 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 24 ♕b1+ ♔g8 25 ♕xb7 and White has a large advantage.

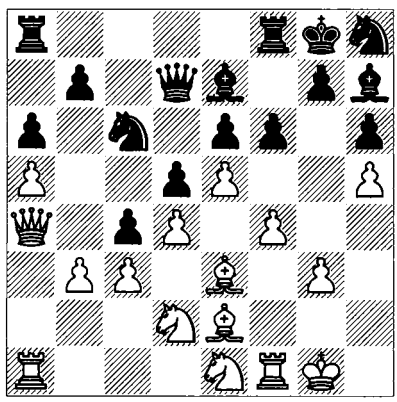
18...f6

This attack on the head of White's pawn-chain is the only way to revive the h8-knight.

19 f4 ♕d7?

19...♘f7, following the principle of 'improving the position of the worst-placed piece', offers more defensive chances.

20 b3!



Why is attacking the head of Black's pawn-chain so effective? Firstly, it brings the knight to b3, in striking range of the tempting c5-square, and secondly it opens up the possibility of c4, exposing Black's weakness along the a2-g8 diagonal (created by the 'thematic' advance ...f6).

20...cxb3 21 ♘xb3 ♖ac8 22 ♘d3

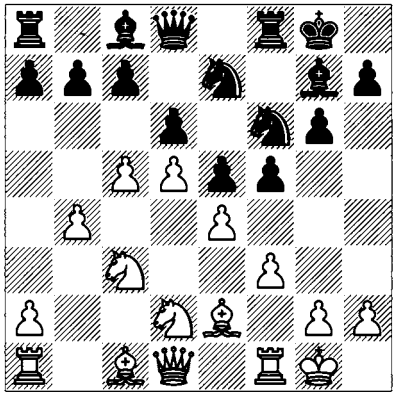
Black has to take this or else White jumps into c5, but it leaves his light squares very weak.

22...♗xd3 23 ♗xd3 ♘b8 24 c4! ♕xa4 25 ♖xa4 ♖fd8 26 cxd5 ♖c3 27 ♘c1 exd5 28 e6

Cruelly immobilizing the h8-knight.

28...f5 29 ♗d2 ♖c6 30 ♗xf5 ♖c4 31 ♖xc4 dxc4 32 ♘e2 ♘c6 33 ♖b1 ♗f6 34 ♗c3 ♘e7 35 ♗e4 ♘d5 36 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 37 ♖xb7 ♖xh5 38 d5 1-0

B



Gelfand – Nakamura
World Team Ch, Bursa 2010

This example is more in keeping with traditional theories, but even here there is a surprise (see Black's 16th move). White's pawn-chain extends from g2 to d5, while Black's consists of the c7-, d6- and e5-pawns. White is already exerting pressure on d6, which is close to the base of Black's chain, while Black is pressing on e4. However, Black's pressure is not very effective as the e4-pawn is securely defended. Black therefore adopts a typical strategy, which is to transfer the target of attack nearer the base of the chain.

12...f4

The plan is ...g5, ...h5 and ...g4, both to press on f3 and to create threats against White's king.

13 ♘c4 g5 14 a4 ♘g6 15 ♗a3 ♖f7 16 b5

For 16 a5 see Beliavsky-Nakamura (page 142).

16...dxc5!?

An innovative strategy. The traditional move has been 16...♗f8, when White strikes with 17 b6, completing the strategy of attacking the base of Black's chain. The move played shows another method of handling such positions. Black concedes the battle for d6 and allows his pawn-chain to be broken up. This may seem like a major concession, but it gains time which Black can use to further his kingside counterplay.

17 ♗xc5 h5 18 a5

White presses ahead with his other queenside pawns to open some lines.

18...g4 19 b6 g3

Black once again bypasses the current point of attack (here f3) and turns his attention to g2, the base of White's pawn-chain. This square will be attacked by pieces rather than pawns (for example, by some combination of ...♘h4, ...♖g7 and ...♗h3) but the basic strategy is the same.

20 ♔h1

A necessary safety-first measure to allow the defensive ♗g1. After 20 h3? ♗xh3 21 gxh3 ♕d7 or 20 ♘b5? ♘d7 21 ♗b4 ♘xb6 22 axb6 ♕h4 Black has a very dangerous attack.

20...♗f8 21 d6

The best move. 21 ♗xf8?? loses at once to 21...♘xe4!, while 21 ♗g1? ♘h4 22 ♖e1 ♘xg2! 23 ♔xg2 ♖g7 was winning for Black in Rousel Roozmon-Charbonneau, Montreal 2008.

21...axb6 22 ♗g1

22 axb6? ♖xa1 23 ♕xa1 cxd6 24 ♖d1 is bad due to 24...♘g4! 25 fxg4 ♕h4 26 ♗g1 hxg4, with a tremendous attack.

22...♘h4?!

This ambitious move may not be justified. 22...gxh2 offers good prospects of equality.

23 ♖e1?!

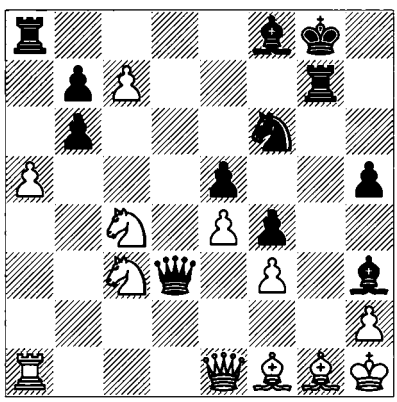
23 hxg3! fxg3 24 ♗e3 gives Black some problems, since 24...♗h3 25 ♖g1 ♗xg2+ (or 25...♕d7 26 ♗f1) 26 ♖xg2 ♖g7 27 dxc7 ♕c8 28 ♗f1 ♕h3+ 29 ♔g1 looks good for White.

23...♘xg2! 24 dxc7?

White can still draw by 24 ♔xg2 ♖g7 25 dxc7 gxh2+ 26 ♔h1 hxg1♕+ 27 ♖xg1 ♕xc7 28 axb6 ♖xa1 29 bxc7 ♖xd1 30 ♗xd1 ♖xg1+ 31 ♔xg1 ♗b4, with an equal ending.

24...♘xe1 25 ♕xe1 g2+! 26 ♔xg2 ♖g7+ 27 ♔h1 ♗h3 28 ♗f1 ♕d3!!

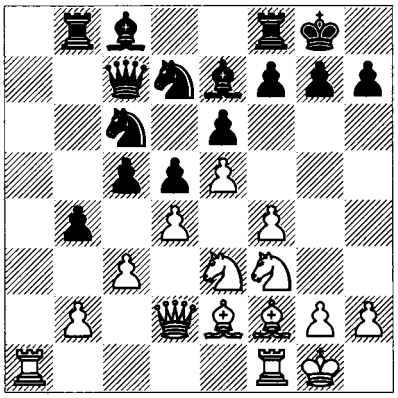
W



29 ♘xe5 ♗xf1 30 ♕xf1 ♕xc3 31 ♖c1 ♕xe5 32 c8♕ ♖xc8 33 ♖xc8 ♕e6 0-1

79 Pawn-Chains and Space Advantages

B



Alekseev – Riazantsev
Russian Ch, Moscow 2008

Black has done his best to undermine White's b2-e5 pawn-chain but this has given him only limited counterplay because some of his pieces, especially the c8-bishop and f8-rook, are not helping his queenside play. On the other hand, White's pieces are all well placed to support the advance f5, which could lead to an attack on the king. White's pawn-chain gives him more space in the centre and this confers an advantage so long as there are still many pieces on the board.

16...♘a5 17 ♕d1

To stop ...♘b3.

17...bxc3 18 bxc3 ♘b3?

This loses time. 18...g6? is no better, as after 19 g4 White will force through f5 in any case. 18...♖b2! 19 ♖b1 ♖a2 20 f5 ♘c6 is a better chance, since Black's active rook interferes with White's attempts to create kingside threats.

19 ♖b1 ♘a5 20 f5 ♖xb1 21 ♕xb1 ♕b6 22 ♕a2! ♘c6 23 ♖b1 ♕a5 24 ♕xa5 ♘xa5

White's space advantage persists even without the queens and Black's lack of manoeuvring room makes it hard for him to improve the coordination of his pieces.

25 g4?!

Too cautious. Instead, White should take the chance to exchange Black's good bishop by 25 ♗h4!, with a large advantage.

25...♗d8

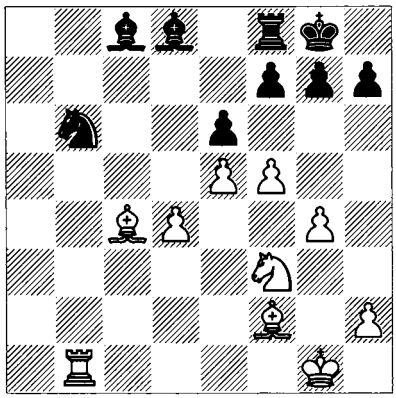
This allows Black to avoid the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

26 ♗d3 cxd4 27 cxd4 ♘c4?

Giving up a pawn to activate his pieces, but this panic reaction isn't necessary as Black has drawing chances after the modest 27...♘b6 28 ♘d2 ♘c6.

28 ♘xc4 dxc4 29 ♗xc4 ♘b6

W



30 ♗a2!

Playing for the initiative is correct; White is prepared to offer material to set his central pawns in motion. 30 ♗d3 h5 31 gxh5 exf5 32 ♗e1 ♘d5 33 ♗d2 ♗e6 permits Black more defensive chances.

30...exf5 31 d5

White's pawn-chain has gone, but in its place there is a pair of advanced central pawns supported by active pieces, while the legacy of White's space advantage is the poor positioning of Black's pieces on the back rank.

31...♘a4

31...fxg4 32 ♘d4, with the deadly threat of 33 e6 fxe6 34 ♘xe6, is also hopeless for Black.

32 ♖c1 ♗a5 33 ♘d4 ♘c3 34 ♗c4 ♗b7

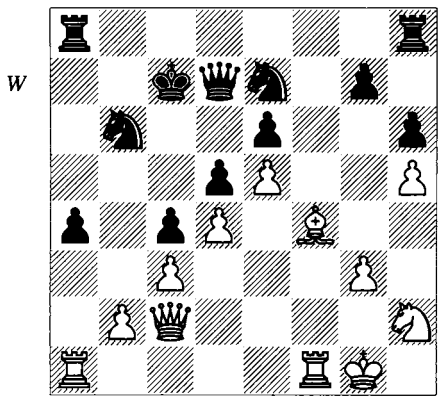
34...♘e4 35 ♘xf5 ♗xf5 36 gxf5 ♘xf2 37 ♔xf2 ♗d2 38 ♖c2 ♗f4 39 ♖e2 ♖c8 40 ♖e4 is winning for White.

35 ♘xf5

White is a pawn up with a good position. He doesn't win in the most efficient way, but reels in the full point in the end.

35...♘e4 36 d6 ♘g5 37 ♘e7+ ♔h8 38 ♗e2 ♘h3+ 39 ♔f1 ♘xf2 40 ♔xf2 ♗b6+ 41 ♔f1 ♗d8 42 ♖b1 ♗a8 43 ♔f2 g6 44 ♗f3 ♔g7 45 ♗xa8 ♗xe7 46 dxe7 ♖xa8 47 g5 1-0

While a spatial preponderance is usually an advantage, having more advanced pawns involves a certain risk because there is a large empty space behind the pawns and enemy pieces can wreak havoc if they penetrate into this space. While there are still many pieces on the board, the side with the space advantage can usually prevent this from happening, but as pieces are exchanged, the attacker's forces may become too thinly spread to prevent enemy pieces from penetrating. This explains one basic concept of space advantages: the defender's best strategy is usually to exchange pieces whenever possible.



Adams – Caruana
Dresden Olympiad 2008

The pawn-structure has an element of symmetry, but White's pawn-chain extends further forward in the centre, which is normally more important than a similar advantage on a flank.

29 ♖f2 ♖af8 30 ♖af1 ♕e8 31 ♕e2 ♖f5 32 g4 ♖f7 33 ♗c1 ♖hf8 34 ♘f3 ♘d7 35 ♕c2 ♘b6

Black cannot undertake anything active, so he just waits. White's problem is that he cannot make progress without allowing the exchange of all the rooks. Such an exchange must be made at the right moment to prevent enemy pieces from penetrating.

36 ♔g2?!

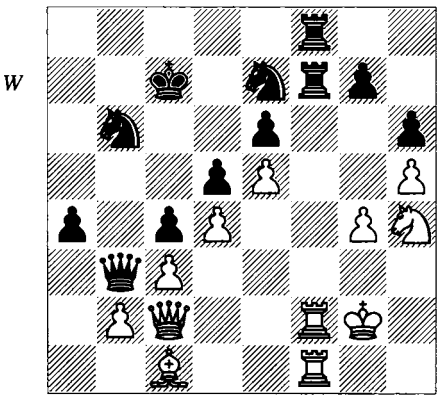
This is a good moment to play 36 ♘h4 ♖xf2 37 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 38 ♔xf2, since Black has to worry about a possible ♕h7.

36...♕b5 37 ♘h4?

This is a more serious mistake, and puts White in danger. He should play 37 ♔g3, when 37...♕b3? loses to 38 ♕xb3 cxb3 39 ♘g5!.

37...♕b3!

Now White cannot prevent Black's pieces from penetrating after the exchange of rooks.



38 ♕h7?!

After this White is lost. 38 ♕xb3? ♖xf2+ 39 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 40 ♔xf2 cxb3 is also hopeless as White is paralysed by the possibility of ...a3. Relatively best was 38 ♕d2! ♖xf2+ 39 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 40 ♕xf2 a3 41 bxa3 ♕xc3 42 ♗e3, when Black is better but White is still in the game.

38...♖xf2+ 39 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 40 ♔xf2 ♔d7!

Indirectly defending the g7-pawn due to the possibility of ...♕c2+.

41 ♘f3 a3 42 bxa3 ♘a4!

It's much better to take on c3 with the knight, which can then move to e4 to start an attack against White's king.

43 ♗d2

43 ♕xg7 ♕c2+ 44 ♗d2 ♘xc3 45 ♕xh6 ♘e4+ 46 ♔e1 c3 is also hopeless for White.

43...♘xc3 44 ♗xc3 ♕xc3

The c-pawn is too strong, although Black still needs to play accurately to win.

45 ♕b1 ♔c7 46 a4 ♘c6 47 ♕g6 ♕b2+! 48 ♔g3 c3 49 ♘e1 ♕e2 50 ♘c2 ♔b6

White is paralysed.

51 a5+ ♔xa5 52 ♕xe6 ♕d3+! 53 ♔f4 ♕e4+ 54 ♔g3 ♕d3+ 55 ♔f4 ♕xc2

Threatening mate on f2.

56 ♕xd5+ ♔b4 57 ♕c5+

After 57 ♕xc6 ♕f2+ 58 ♔e4 ♕g2+ the white queen is lost.

57...♔b3 58 ♕d5+ ♔b2 59 ♕b5+ ♕b3 60 ♕xc6 c2 61 ♕g2 ♕b4 62 ♔f5 ♕xd4 63 ♕e2 ♔c3 64 ♕e1+ ♕d2 65 ♕a1+ ♔b3 0-1

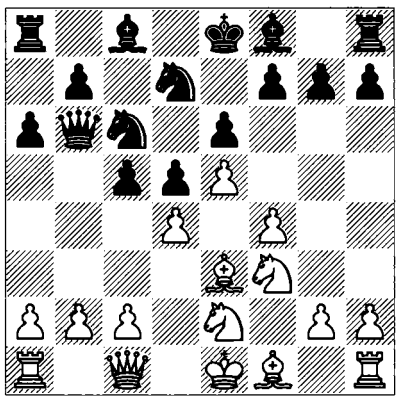
80 Sacrificial Demolition of Pawn-Chains

Predojević – Morozevich
Sarajevo 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♘f3 ♘c6 7 ♗e3 a6 8 ♘e2?!

8 ♕d2 is the main line. The text-move is an ambitious attempt to consolidate White's pawn-centre by playing c3, but it involves delaying White's development.

8...♕b6 9 ♕c1



9...g5

When tackling an extended pawn-centre (here d4-e5-f4 with c3 to come), it's essential to be quick. If White's pawn-centre is allowed to stand, then he will eventually complete his development and consolidate his space advantage. The time taken to construct such a centre often leaves its owner behind in development and the opponent must strike before this situation can be rectified. Thus Morozevich's vigorous play is entirely justified.

10 c3

After 10 fxg5 cxd4 11 ♘exd4 ♘cxe5 12 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13 ♗e2 White's centre has disappeared and Black has a comfortable position. The move played attempts to shore up the centre.

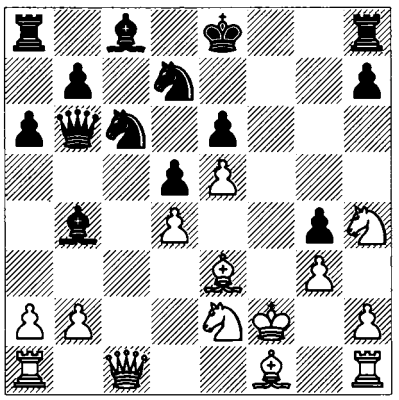
10...cxd4 11 cxd4 ♗b4+!

Since 12 ♗d2 is strongly met by 12...g4, White has to move his king.

12 ♔f2 f6 13 g3 g4!

In the earlier game Topalov-Morozevich, Morelia/Linares 2007, Morozevich had played 13...♖f8, but after 14 ♔g2 g4 15 ♘h4 ♖g8 16 h3 h5 17 hxg4 hxg4 18 ♘c3 White's centre was fairly solid and he went on to win. In the meantime, Morozevich had realized that to destroy White's centre he must play with the utmost energy.

14 ♘h4 fxe5 15 fxe5



15...♘dxe5!

This piece sacrifice gives Black a very strong initiative.

16 dxe5 d4 17 ♗f4

If White returns the material by 17 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 18 ♗e2 ♖f8+ 19 ♔g2 ♘xe2 20 ♗xb6 ♘xc1 21 ♖axc1 ♗d7 22 ♖hd1 then Black's two bishops give him the advantage.

17...♖f8! 18 ♔g2 ♗d7!

The many threats of 19...♘xe5 followed by 20...♗c6+, 19...d3 or simply 19...♖c8 are too much for White's disorganized forces.

19 h3 d3 20 hxg4

White ends up returning the piece anyway.

20...dxe2 21 ♗xe2 ♘d4 22 ♕e3?

This further error dooms White. 22 ♗f3 is better, restricting Black to a modest advantage.

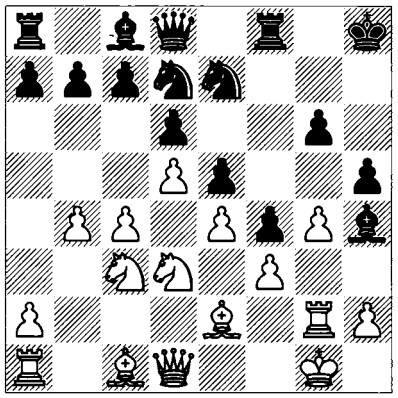
22...♗c5 23 b4 ♕xb4 24 ♖hb1

24 ♖ab1 is slightly better, but 24...♗c6+ 25 ♔h3 ♘xe2 26 ♕xe2 ♕e4 is dreadful for White in any case.

24...♕a5 25 ♔h3 ♘xe2 26 ♕xe2 ♗d4

Now Black wins the exchange, and wraps the game up efficiently.

27 ♗h6 ♖f2 28 ♕e4 ♗xa1 29 ♖xa1 0-0-0 30 ♗g5 ♗c6 31 ♖c1 ♕d5 32 ♕xh7 ♕xa2 33 ♖xc6+ bxc6 34 ♘f3 ♖xf3 35 ♗xd8 ♔xd8 0-1



Elianov – Cheparinov
Jermuk 2009

In this typical King's Indian position, White adopted a very interesting plan, sacrificing a pawn on the kingside in order to gain time for his queenside attack.

16 g5!?

This advanced pawn is doomed, but Black must put in considerable effort to win it, which gives White time to make progress on the opposite flank.

16...♘g8 17 ♔h1 ♖f7

Further preparation is needed before the g5-pawn can be taken, since if at once 17...♗xg5 then 18 ♕g1 regains the pawn.

18 c5 ♘f8 19 ♘b5 ♗h3

The most natural move since 19...a6 20 ♘xc7 ♕xc7 21 ♗b2 ♘d7 22 ♖c1 gives White strong pressure for the piece – this line is an example of the sacrificial undermining of a pawn-chain.

20 ♖g1 a6 21 ♘a3

The piece sacrifice is less clear-cut now, so White adopts a slower approach.

21...♗xg5

The pawn is gone, but White's pressure on the queenside starts to become serious.

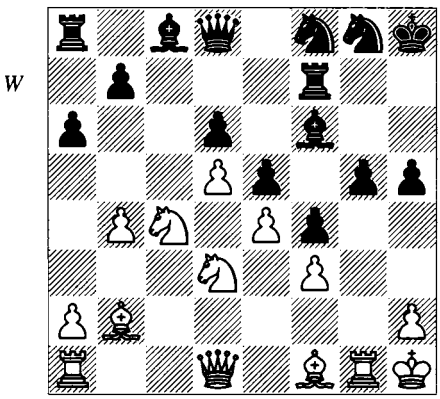
22 ♘c4 ♗f6 23 ♗f1 ♗c8

Black doesn't have much choice, as the exchange of his good bishop would leave squares such as e6 potentially very weak.

24 ♗b2 g5?

This allows White to smash Black's pawn-chain with a sacrifice. 24...♖g7 is a better chance, although after 25 a4 g5 26 b5 axb5 (26...g4 27 b6 is even worse for Black) 27 axb5 ♖xa1 28 ♕xa1 ♘g6 29 b6 dxc5 30 ♘dxe5 White also has a clear advantage. In this line, the traditional approach of undermining the base of the pawn-chain proved effective.

25 cxd6 cxd6



26 ♖xg5!

By offering a rook and a piece, White crashes through to the enemy king.

26...♗xg5?! 27 ♘cxe5?!

This gives White the advantage, but Elianov pointed out that 27 ♘xd6! is truly devastating; for example, after 27...♘h6 28 ♘xe5 ♔g8 29 ♘exf7 ♘xf7 30 ♘xc8 ♘d7 (30...♖xc8 loses to 31 ♕d4) 31 ♕d4! ♗f6 32 ♕g1+! ♔f8 33 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 (33...♘xf6 34 ♘b6) 34 ♗h3 ♖xc8 35 ♗xd7 White is two pawns ahead with the better position.

27...dxe5 28 ♘xe5 ♔g7

28...♕e7 29 ♘xf7++ ♔h7 30 ♘xg5+ ♕xg5 31 ♕d4 and White wins.

29 ♘c6+ ♕f6 30 ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 31 e5 bxc6 32 exf6+ ♘xf6?

The final error. After 32...♖xf6! 33 dxc6 ♖xc6 34 b5 axb5 35 ♗xb5 ♖g6 White retains an advantage due to Black's exposed king and poor coordination, but there is no clear win.

33 dxc6 ♗e6 34 ♖c1 ♖aa7 35 a4

The queenside pawns are too strong and Black soon has to surrender material to hold them up.

35...♖ae7 36 b5 axb5 37 axb5 ♘8d7 38 ♗c4 ♗xc4 39 ♖xc4 ♘e5 40 ♖xf4 ♖e6 41 ♕g1+ ♔h8 42 ♕c1 ♘xc6 43 bxc6 ♖c7 44 ♖c4 ♔g7 45 f4 ♔f7 46 f5 ♖d6 47 h3 ♘g8 48 ♖c2 ♘e7 49 ♕g5 ♖cxc6 50 ♕xh5+ ♔f8 51 ♕h8+ ♔f7 52 ♖g2 ♘xf5 53 ♕h7+ 1-0

Typical Central Pawn-Formations

This part of the book contains a number of case studies involving typical pawn-structures arising from specific openings, showing how the central pawn-structure determines the nature of the game and the plans available to both sides.

The simplest centre is one in which the d- and e-files are both empty of pawns, which we call the **open centre**. If both sides can develop freely and bring their rooks to the open files, then the result will often be mass exchanges and a draw. However, if one side has a lead in development then the open position will give him plenty of chances to create threats and interfere with his opponent's development. This can allow the attacker to increase his pressure in a self-sustaining process. Mamedyarov-Topalov (page 196) is an example of this phenomenon. Black opened the centre, but was soon forced to concede the right to castle. A further slip allowed White's initiative to grow to decisive proportions. In Kariakin-Gelfand (page 197), White had the two bishops, which in an open position offers the potential for a real advantage. However, Gelfand's careful defence, based on a couple of small tactical points, enabled him to nullify White's initiative and hold the game.

Another rather simple centre is that in which the e-file is open and the pawns on d4 and d5 face each other, which we call the **open e-file centre**. The open file and symmetrical structure may again indicate a lack of tension, but here there are more strategic possibilities than with an open centre. Once again, the initiative is important and in Topalov-Gelfand (page 198) White was able to convert his pressure into a more permanent advantage which left Black struggling. Unlike the open centre, in which Black is normally playing only for a draw, the open e-file centre also allows Black to play for an advantage, especially if White is too ambitious. In Naiditsch-Kramnik (page 199), White played for a queenside pawn advance, but unwisely ignored the growing danger to his king.

A more complex centre is that in which White has pawns on c3, d4 and e4 and Black has pawns on d6 and e5. We call this the **Closed Ruy Lopez centre** since it arises most often from that opening. A key feature of this pawn-structure is White's pawn-duo on d4 and e4 which, so long as it remains intact, should offer White better central control. In the Ruy Lopez, Black usually attempts to disrupt these pawns, either by pressure against e4 or with the move ...c5. White can often maintain the pawns where they are, but only at the cost of placing his pieces awkwardly and allowing Black active play elsewhere. If White is able to keep his pawn-centre intact without making any significant concessions, then he generally gains an advantage. That's what happens in Nunn-Pinter (page 200), where White's solid centre allowed him to play both in the middle of the board and on the kingside. Adams-Humpy (page 201) followed a different course, although the basic logic was the same. White managed to keep his centre intact for several moves, and only played d5 when he was assured of a clear advantage on the queenside. In the end, threats on both sides of the board proved too much for Black.

Many popular openings lead to highly unbalanced pawn-structures. In the **Winawer Variation** of the French Defence, the moves 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 give rise to a position in which Black has surrendered his important dark-squared bishop for the sake of seriously damaging White's queenside pawns. The play in this line is very double-edged, with White trying to exploit the weakness of the dark squares and develop kingside play, while Black aims to target the doubled pawns. White's dark-squared bishop is often the key player with this pawn-structure; if it becomes active and can move outside the pawn-chain then Black will often be in trouble, but if it remains passive, White will suffer from his bad bishop as the endgame approaches. Nakamura-Shulman (page 202) is a good example of the battle to activate the bishop; for a long time the struggle remained balanced, but when White made the mistake of becoming over-ambitious, Black was able to launch an unexpectedly fierce attack. In Sutovsky-Diachkov (page 203), Black erroneously opened the a3-f8 diagonal, hoping to win a piece. This not only failed to gain material, but even allowed White's dark-squared bishop to develop colossal power.

In the **Sicilian Scheveningen structure**, which arises from the Open Sicilian, Black has pawns on d6 and e6, while White has a pawn on e4 and no d-pawn. This centre is interesting because Black (in common with other lines of the Open Sicilian) has a numerical superiority in the centre. This automatically gives the position an unbalanced character, and sets the tone for the battle ahead. Black's modest centre is solid, offering no immediate purchase for an attack by White, and in an endgame Black often stands well since the half-open c-file gives him pressure against the enemy queenside. White's chances lie more in the middlegame, since he has a space advantage, and he may create threats against Black's kingside by advancing his f-pawn and possibly his g-pawn as well. Zagrebelny-Ulybin (page 204) shows White's plans succeeding to perfection, with a menacing kingside attack breaking through after a slip by Black. Kamsky-Mamedyarov (page 205) works out better for Black, since a favourable move-order in the opening gave him an extra tempo to set his queenside play in motion more quickly.

The **Sicilian Najdorf structure**, with a white pawn on e4 and no d-pawn against black pawns on d6 and e5, arises not only in the Najdorf, but also in several other variations of the Sicilian. It is characterized by Black's backward pawn on d6 and the corresponding weakness on d5. In Adams-Svidler (page 206), White was able to maintain his grip on d5 while he developed play on the queenside. Black made a bid for activity in a position where White already had a positional advantage, and this only accelerated his downfall. Dvoirys-Wang Yue (page 207) shows why many players like this pawn-structure for Black, despite the backward pawn. White's e4-pawn came under attack and this prevented him from developing his pieces to good squares. Black soon gained a lead in development and when he managed to play ...d5, liquidating the backward pawn and opening up the position, he was already close to winning.

We call the pawn-structure with white pawn on d4 and no e-pawn against pawns on c6 and e6 the **Caro-Kann pawn-structure**, although it can also arise from several other openings. Black's position is typified by its great solidity, and although White has a modest space advantage, it's often difficult for him to do anything with it. This pawn-structure can be transformed if White plays ♘e5, allowing a piece exchange on e5. White still has a space advantage in the resulting position, but the open d-file gives Black possibilities for counterplay. Kobaliya-Loncar (page 208) shows what White is aiming for: to advance his kingside pawns to gain space and harass Black's light-squared bishop. Leko-Ivanchuk (page 209) offers the other side of the story; here Black seized control of the open d-file and penetrated with his pieces, exploiting the weaknesses created by White's earlier pawn advances.

In some openings, Black allows White to form a broad pawn-centre with the aim of attacking it later. The **King's Indian** is one such opening, and the positions resulting are often very double-edged. One of White's most ambitious lines is the **Sämisch Variation**, in which White erects a massive centre with pawns on c4, d4, e4 and f3. This gives White an early space advantage which, depending on the line chosen, can be used for further action on either side of the board. In Bu Xiangzhi-Zviagintsev (page 210), White uses his central control as a platform to launch a kingside attack, while Black aims for counterplay in the centre and on the queenside. In such a position the smallest slip is likely to prove fatal, and here it is Black who goes wrong first. S.Kasparov-Bocharov (page 211) features a different scenario. Black played to break up White's extended pawn-centre and by move 21 all four of White's central pawns had vanished, although at the cost of some severe pawn-weaknesses. However, this time it was White who went wrong by losing time capturing an irrelevant pawn.

The **Benoni structure**, with white pawns on e4 and d5, black pawns on d6 and c5 and no black e-pawn or white c-pawn, can arise in various lines of the Benoni and King's Indian. It's another structure that features a central pawn imbalance, as White has an extra central pawn, which is offset by Black's 3 to 2 queenside majority. This imbalance immediately determines the main plans for both sides, with White aiming for a central push by e5 while Black hopes to advance his queenside majority. In Yakovenko-Gashimov (page 212), White's plan dominated, since he managed to restrain Black on the queenside while preparing his central advance. L.B.Hansen-Gelfand (page 213) shows the opposite, with White's central play stymied while Black steadily ups the pressure on the queenside.

81 The Open Centre

We call the situation in which the two central files are completely devoid of pawns the **open centre**. If both sides can complete their development without problems, the open files tend to lead to piece exchanges and equality. Therefore the initiative is very important, since if one side can exert pressure which interferes with the opponent's development, the result can be a dangerous attack, made all the stronger by the open files which provide convenient avenues to penetrate the enemy position.

Mamedyarov – Topalov
Sofia 2007

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 c6 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7 ♕b3 ♘d7 8 e4 dxe4 9 ♘xe4 ♕f4

9...♕f5 10 ♗d3 ♕a5+ 11 ♘c3 ♗e7 is more solid.

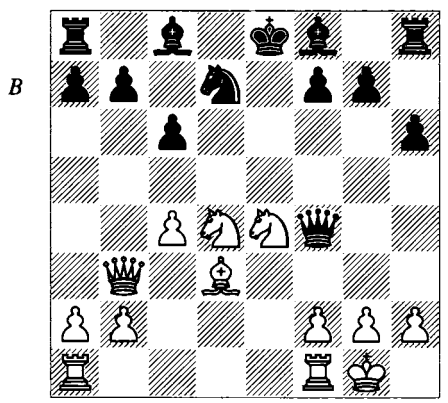
10 ♗d3 e5

Trying to free the c8-bishop, but it is risky to open lines while his king is still in the centre.

11 0-0 exd4?!

11...f5? 12 ♖fe1! fxe4 13 ♖xe4 ♕f7 14 ♖xe5+! ♔d8 15 ♖f5 is also very perilous for Black, but the more solid 11...♗e7! 12 ♖fe1 exd4 offers good chances for equality.

12 ♘xd4



Now we have an open centre in which White has an ominous lead in development. Black is already forced to play unnatural moves since 12...♗e7? is bad due to 13 ♘f5!.

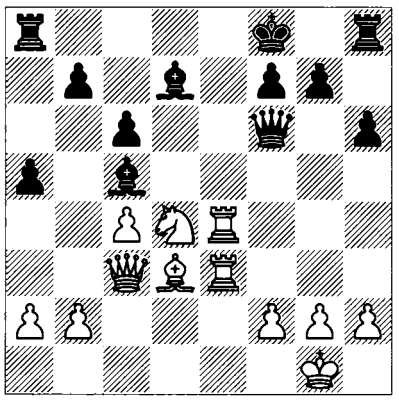
12...♘c5 13 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 14 ♖ae1+ ♔f8

Although Black's position looks precarious, there are no real weaknesses in his position and if he could solve the problem of his king position, his two bishops would be a useful asset in the long run. The alternative is to run the other way with the king, hoping to hide on c7, but after 14...♔d8 15 ♘e2 ♕h4 16 ♘g3 ♔c7 17 ♗f5 White also retains some advantage.

15 ♖e4 ♕f6 16 ♕c3 a5

Black plays to prevent b4, which would more or less force him to exchange on d4.

17 ♖fe1 ♗d7 18 ♖1e3



18...♗b4?

This is wrong because it frees the knight from the awkward pins. 18...h5 is better, preparing to develop the rook via h6 while keeping White's knight immobilized. In this case, White retains attacking chances, but there is nothing clear-cut.

19 ♕c2 ♕d6 20 ♖f3 h5 21 c5!

By sacrificing a pawn, White opens the a2-g8 diagonal to intensify the pressure against f7.

21...♗xc5 22 ♗c4 f6 23 ♘e6+ ♗xe6 24 ♖xe6

White has a decisive attack against Black's horribly exposed king.

24...♕d7 25 ♕f5 ♕d4 26 ♖e4

Freeing e6 for the queen.

26...♕d1+ 27 ♗f1 ♗d6

27...♗b6 28 ♕e6 is also decisive.

28 ♖d3 ♗xh2+ 29 ♔xh2 ♕xf1 30 ♖d7 1-0

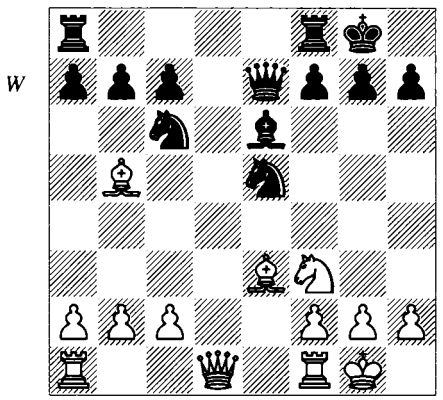
It's mate in a few moves as there is no answer to the threats of ♕e6 and ♕g6.

Kariakin – Gelfand
Jermuk 2009

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d4 ♘xe4 4 ♗d3 d5 5 dxe5 ♗e7 6 0-0 ♘c5 7 ♗e2 0-0 8 ♗e3 ♘c6 9 ♘c3 ♗e6 10 ♗b5 ♘d7

White has adopted a rather innocuous line against the Petroff and now the pressure against e5 virtually forces the liquidation of the remaining central pawns. The resulting position affords White an edge, but Gelfand demonstrates how careful play allows Black to neutralize this.

11 ♘xd5 ♘dxe5 12 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7



Here we again have an open centre but in contrast to the previous example, Black is not behind in development. However, this does not mean that he can afford to be complacent. White has the two bishops, which could become a powerful force in such an open position. Moreover, it is White's turn and he uses the tempo to activate his queen with gain of time.

13 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 14 ♕d4 ♖fd8!

It's just as important to be tactically alert in defence as in attack. Here Black uses a tactical point to avoid making a passive retreating move. After a timid move such as 14...♗d7 White has much better chances; for example, 15 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 16 ♕c3 c5 17 ♖fe1 b6 18 ♖ad1 and now White's advantage is far more concrete.

15 ♕xe5

White may as well take, even though this means surrendering the two bishops, since if he wastes time moving the queen then Black has no problems at all.

15...♖d5 16 ♕e4 ♖xb5 17 b3

Black must still take care, since the b7-pawn is under threat, so the rook cannot at once return from b5. Note that 17...♖d5? is a mistake due to 18 c4, winning a pawn.

17...c6 18 c4

Preventing the rook from returning to d5.

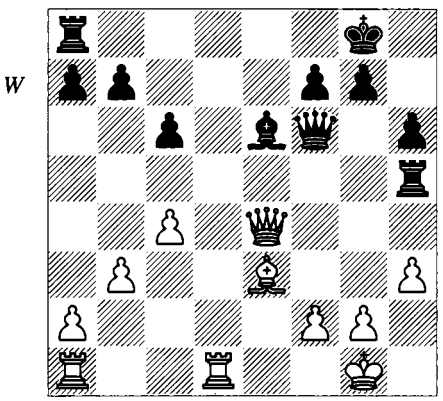
18...♖h5

The opposite-coloured bishops mean that White's winning chances will be minimal if only Black can solve the problem of his wayward rook.

19 h3 ♕f6 20 ♖fd1?!

20 ♖ad1 offers slightly more chances, as White can more easily double rooks on the d-file, but Black is in no real danger.

20...h6



21 ♗d4

The attack on a1 means that ♖d2 is impossible, so White tries another tack.

21...♕f5 22 ♕xf5 ♖xf5 23 g4 ♖f4 24 ♖d3 h5

A typical defensive ploy: exchanging pawns.

25 f3 hxg4 26 fxg4 b5

The steady reduction in material gives Black's pieces more scope and reduces White's winning chances to zero.

27 cxb5 cxb5 28 ♖ad1 a5 29 ♗e3 ♖e4 30 ♔f2 a4

Systematically exchanging one pawn after another.

31 ♔f3 ♖e5 32 ♖d8+ ♖xd8 33 ♖xd8+ ♔h7 34 bxa4 bxa4 35 ♖d4 ♗xa2 36 ♖xa4 ½-½

While there's nothing spectacular in this example, you will gain more half-points by learning to play as Gelfand did here than by studying any number of flashy combinations.

82 The Open e-File Centre

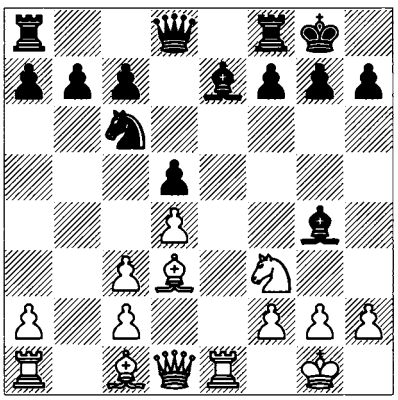
Topalov – Gelfand
Wijk aan Zee 2008

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘xe4 5 d4 d5 6 ♗d3 ♘c6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♘c3 ♘xc3?!

8...♗f5 9 ♖e1 ♘xc3 10 bxc3 ♗xd3 11 ♕xd3 0-0 is a better choice, since the exchange of light-squared bishops gives Black more freedom.

9 bxc3 ♗g4 10 ♖e1 0-0

W



A typical position with the open e-file centre, which can arise from various openings but occurs most commonly in the Petroff. At first sight the position is drawish, as White has no promising pawn-breaks (playing c4 severely weakens the d4-pawn) and the open file seems likely to lead to the exchange of rooks. However, White's prospects should not be underestimated since he has a lead in development and slightly more active pieces. Moreover, Black's defensive strategy is based entirely on neutralizing White's more active pieces and is not based on any active counterplay of his own. If things go well for Black, White's initiative will peter out and the result will be a draw, but if Black commits an inaccuracy then White's pressure can easily increase to dangerous proportions.

11 ♗f4 ♗d6

As we shall see, Black cannot avoid a concession of some sort after this move. 11...♗h5 12 ♖b1 ♖b8 is more solid, aiming for ...♗g6 to neutralize the active bishop on d3.

12 ♗xd6 cxd6?!

The natural 12...♕xd6? fails to 13 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 14 ♘g5+ ♔g6 15 ♕xg4 f5 16 ♕h4 ♖h8 17 ♖e6+ ♕xe6 18 ♕xh8!, when White reaches an ending with a clear extra pawn.

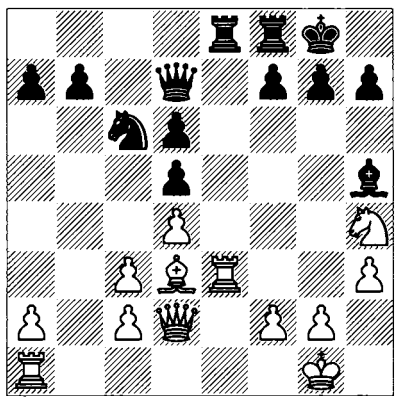
The other option is 12...♗xf3, but after 13 ♕xf3 ♕xd6 14 ♖e3 ♖ae8 15 ♖ae1 ♖xe3 16 ♖xe3 g6 17 h4 White retains a slight advantage. However, this is probably better than conceding doubled d-pawns as in the game.

13 ♖e3 ♕d7

Black cannot swap rooks as 13...♖e8? loses to 14 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 15 ♗xh7+ ♔xh7 16 ♘g5+.

14 h3 ♗h5 15 ♕d2 ♖ae8 16 ♘h4!

B



An excellent idea. f5 will be a good square for the knight, and later it may drop back to e3 to target the weak d5-pawn.

16...♖xe3 17 ♕xe3 ♕e6

17...♗g6 18 ♘xg6 hxg6 19 ♖e1 gives White total control of the e-file.

18 ♘f5 ♖d8

18...♕xe3? loses a pawn after 19 ♘xe3 ♘e7 20 ♖b1 b6 21 ♖b5.

19 ♕g5 ♗g6 20 ♘e3 ♗e4 21 ♖e1 h6 22 ♕h4 ♕g6 23 ♗e2! ♗xc2 24 ♗h5?!

White should follow up his pawn sacrifice by 24 ♗f3 ♗f5 25 ♘xd5, when he has a large advantage thanks to his dominant knight. The immediate threat is 26 ♕xd8+.

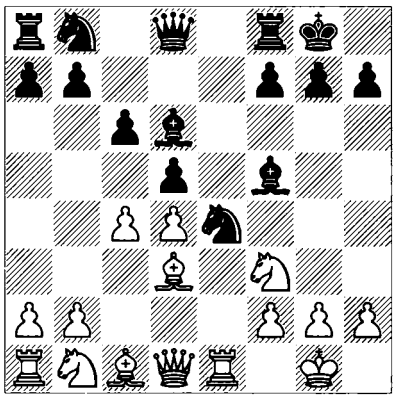
24...♕e4 25 ♕g3 ♗d3 26 f3 ♕e7??

Losing at once. 26...♕h7 27 ♕f4 ♗g6 28 ♗xg6 ♕xg6 29 ♘xd5 favours White, but Black still has chances to defend.

27 ♘g4 ♕g5 28 f4 1-0

Naiditsch – Kramnik
Dortmund 2009

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘xe4 5 d4 d5 6 ♗d3 ♗d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c4 c6 9 ♖e1 ♗f5



10 c5?

Releasing the tension leaves a typical open e-file position, but with a crucial difference: thanks to the tempi White has expended on pushing his c-pawn, Black is able to maintain his knight on e4 and is not forced to exchange it. This crucial difference saves Black time and makes it hard for White to develop his dark-squared bishop. White should choose 10 ♕b3 or 10 ♘c3 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♗xd3 12 ♕xd3 dxc4 13 ♕xc4, although neither line promises him much.

10...♗c7 11 ♘c3 ♘d7 12 ♕c2

After 12 ♘xe4 dxe4 13 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 14 ♖xe4 ♘xc5 Black is slightly better, so White steps up the pressure on e4, hoping to force Black to exchange his knight.

12...♖e8

Once again Black manages to maintain his knight on e4.

13 ♗e3?!

This is too slow. 13 ♗g5 ♘xg5 14 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 15 ♘xg5 ♗xd3 16 ♕xd3 ♘f6 is best, when Black has only a minute edge.

13...h6?!

13...♕f6! causes White more problems, as now the e4-knight can be supported by ...♕g6 if necessary.

14 b4?!

White misses his chance and this further loss of time allows Black's initiative to grow to dangerous proportions. 14 ♘d2 ♕f6 15 ♗xe4 dxe4 16 d5 is better, with an unclear position.

14...♘df6

Now the e4-knight is definitely secure, and the build-up of black pieces against White's poorly-defended kingside has become ominous.

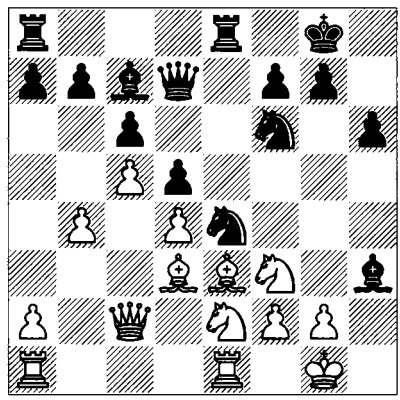
15 h3

To prevent ...♘g4, but now the protruding h-pawn becomes a target.

15...♕d7 16 ♘e2?!

16 ♘e5?! is met by 16...♖xe5! 17 dxe5 ♗xe5, when Black will end up a pawn ahead. 16 ♘d2 was the last chance to hang on.

16...♗xh3!



17 ♘e5

After 17 gxh3 ♕xh3 18 ♘g3 ♘xg3 19 fxg3 ♗xg3 20 ♕g2 ♕xg2+ 21 ♔xg2 ♗xe1 22 ♖xe1 ♘g4 23 ♗d2 ♖xe1 24 ♗xe1 ♖e8 Black's three connected passed pawns will be decisive.

17...♗xe5 18 dxe5 ♖xe5 19 f3 ♖ae8! 20 ♗f4

Or 20 fxe4 dxe4 21 ♗c4 ♗xg2 22 ♔xg2 ♖h5 23 ♘g3 ♕h3+ 24 ♔g1 ♕xg3+ 25 ♕g2 ♕xg2+ 26 ♔xg2 ♘d5, when Black's four passed pawns will be too much for White.

20...♖h5 21 fxe4

The alternative is 21 ♘d4, but then 21...♖h4 22 ♗h2 ♘g4! 23 fxg4 ♗xg2 24 ♗e2 ♖xh2 25 ♔xh2 ♕c7+ 26 ♔g1 ♕g3 27 ♗f1 ♗xf1+ 28 ♔xf1 ♖e5 gives Black a winning attack.

21...dxe4 22 ♗c4 ♗xg2! 23 ♘g3

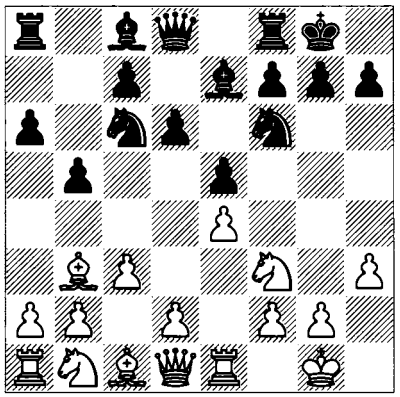
23 ♔xg2 ♕h3+ 24 ♔g1 ♕h1+ 25 ♔f2 ♘g4+ 26 ♔g3 ♕h3#.

23...♗f3 24 ♕b3 ♖h4 25 ♗d6 ♕h3 26 ♗xf7+ ♔h7 27 ♕b2 ♘g4 0-1

83 Closed Ruy Lopez Structure

Nunn – Pinter
European Team Ch, Haifa 1989

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3



The starting position for the main line of the Closed Ruy Lopez. White has more central control than Black, and will soon establish his two pawns abreast on d4 and e4. Black has several possible plans here, most of which are based on attacking the white centre by ...c5, although this may be delayed for several moves. The approach adopted by Black in this game is considered rather old-fashioned, but it is perfectly playable.

9...h6 10 d4 ♖e8 11 ♘bd2 ♗f8 12 ♘f1 ♗d7 13 ♘g3 ♘a5 14 ♗c2 ♘c4

A common idea in the Closed Ruy Lopez. The knight is often poorly placed on a5, so repositioning it to b6 is worth the time involved. The main alternative 14...c5 15 b3 is slightly better for White as the knight stays offside.

15 b3 ♘b6 16 a4!?

The basic rule regarding Closed Ruy Lopez positions is that if White can maintain his pawn duo on d4 and e4, even after Black plays ...c5, then he usually keeps some advantage provided he has not wasted too much time in the process.

16...c5?

Black makes a serious positional error, which allows White to keep his pawns on d4 and e4 without any problems. He should play 16...bxa4 17 bxa4 a5, fixing the weak pawn on a4. Then ...c5 would be much more effective, because with a4 under pressure and ...♘c4 available in response to a move of the c1-bishop, White would find it much harder to organize his pieces to support the central pawns.

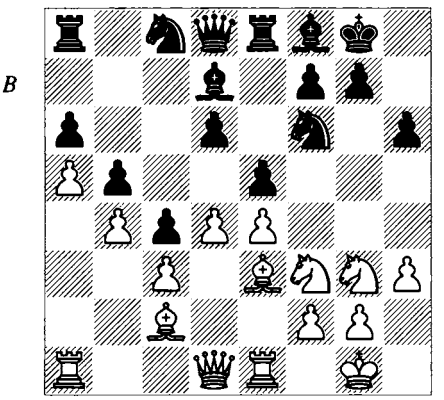
17 a5 ♘c8 18 b4!

The key move since the threat of bxc5 forces Black to commit his c5-pawn.

18...c4

The pawn-structure is superficially similar to that in Smirnov-Romanov (page 152), but the crucial difference is that White's pawn is still on d4. This means not only that c5 is out of bounds to Black's pieces, but also that Black must constantly worry about the possibility of dxe5.

19 ♗e3



19...♕c7 20 ♘h4 ♘e7

The knight hurries across, but Black is in serious trouble.

21 ♕f3

Threatening dxe5 followed by ♗xh6.

21...♘h7 22 ♘hf5 ♘g6?!

22...♕c6 is better, trying to induce d5.

23 ♘h5 ♗e6 24 ♖ad1

The advantages of having the pawn on d4 become more and more apparent, since Black has to consider dxe5 at every move.

24...f6?!

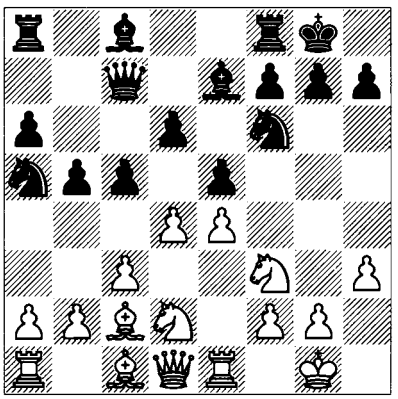
Weakening the g6-knight leads to an immediate disaster, but otherwise Black can only wait while White improves his position.

25 ♕g3 ♕f7 26 dxe5 dxe5 27 ♘hxg7! ♗xg7 28 ♘d6 1-0

Next move ♕xg6 will be deadly for Black.

Adams – Humpy Koneru
Merida 2008

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0-0 ♗e7 6 ♖e1 b5 7 ♗b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♘a5 10 ♗c2 c5 11 d4 ♕c7 12 ♘bd2



This is the main starting point of the Chigorin Variation of the Closed Ruy Lopez. The general comment made in the previous example also holds here: White should try to maintain his pawn duo at d4 and e4.

12...♖d8 13 b3

Black's bishop is still on c8, so there are no immediate threats along the c-file. This means that White can develop his queen's bishop without spending time playing the d2-knight to f1.

13...cxd4?!

This is inconsistent. The main defect with White's plan is that on b2 the bishop can be shut out of the game by ...c4, and by giving up this possibility Black allows White to complete his development and support his centre under favourable circumstances.

14 cxd4 ♘c6 15 ♗b2 ♗b7 16 a3

Adams prefers to rule out ...♘b4.

16...♗f8 17 b4!

An excellent multi-purpose move. Firstly, 17...exd4 18 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 19 ♗xd4 d5 is now bad due to 20 e5 ♘e4 21 ♖c1, since the a3-pawn is no longer hanging. Secondly, by clearing b3 White opens up possibilities such as ♘b3 or ♗b3.

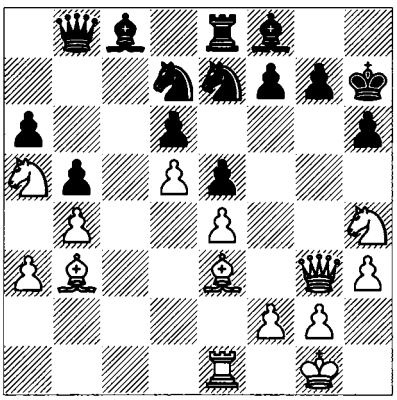
17...♖ac8 18 ♖c1 ♕b8 19 d5

The moment has come to play d5, since White can immediately follow up by ♘b3-a5. Delaying by 19 ♘b3 is inferior, because after 19...exd4 20 ♘bxd4 ♘e5 Black can target the weak c4-square.

19...♘e7 20 ♘b3 ♘d7 21 ♘a5 ♘b6 22 ♗b3

The remainder of the game sees White exploiting his advantage by playing on two fronts. Firstly, he creates threats on the kingside, forcing Black to move some pieces to the threatened sector, and then he exploits the weak c6-square.

22...h6 23 ♕d3 ♖e8 24 ♘h4 ♖xc1 25 ♗xc1 ♗c8 26 ♕g3 ♔h7 27 ♗e3 ♘d7



28 ♘c6

The c6-outpost is especially effective as any exchange on that square activates the b3-bishop.

28...♕c7?

This exposes the queen to attack along the c-file and gives White an important extra tempo. 28...♕b7 is better, although White retains a clear advantage.

29 ♘xe7 ♗xe7 30 ♘f5 ♗f8 31 ♖c1 ♕b8 32 ♕f3!

Threatening 33 ♘xh6 gxh6 34 ♕xf7+.

32...♔g8 33 ♖c3?!

Missing an immediate win by 33 ♗xh6! gxh6 34 ♕g4+ ♔h8 35 ♕h5 ♘f6 (35...♔g8 36 ♖c3 is crushing) 36 ♕xf7 ♗xf5 37 ♕xf6+.

33...♘b6 34 ♗xh6?!

34 ♘xh6+! gxh6 35 ♕h5 wins outright.

34...♗xf5

34...gxh6? 35 ♕g4+ followed by ♖g3 mates.

35 ♕xf5 g6?

35...♖c8! leaves White 'only' a pawn up.

36 ♕g5 ♖c8 37 ♖c6 ♗xh6 38 ♕xh6 ♘c4 39 ♕c1 ♘b6 40 ♕e3 ♖xc6 41 dxc6 ♕c7 42 ♗d5 ♔g7 43 h4 ♘a8 44 ♕g5 1-0

84 French Winawer Structure

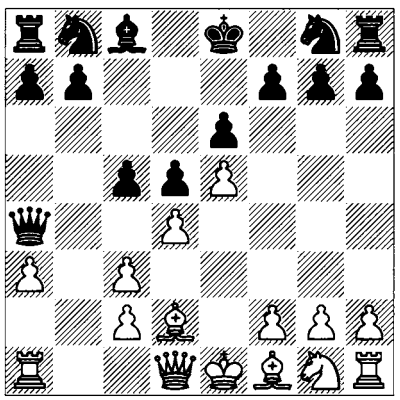
Nakamura – Shulman
USA Ch, Saint Louis 2010

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3

The French Winawer pawn-structure is characterized by the exchange of minor pieces on c3. White's pawn-structure is damaged, but in return he obtains the two bishops. The crucial factor is often whether White can activate his dark-squared bishop. If he can, then Black's weak dark squares may prove fatal, but if he cannot, he may be left with an impotent bad bishop which will handicap him for the rest of the game.

6...♕a5 7 ♗d2 ♕a4

W



This is Black's most direct plan, which has become popular recently. Black exerts irritating pressure on the c2-pawn, and at the same time prevents a4 by White, which would enable a later ♗c1-a3 to occupy the weak a3-f8 diagonal.

8 ♘f3 ♘c6 9 h4

An ambitious plan, offering the d4-pawn but gaining time to make progress on the kingside.

9...cxd4 10 cxd4 ♘ge7 11 h5 ♘xd4 12 ♗d3 h6!

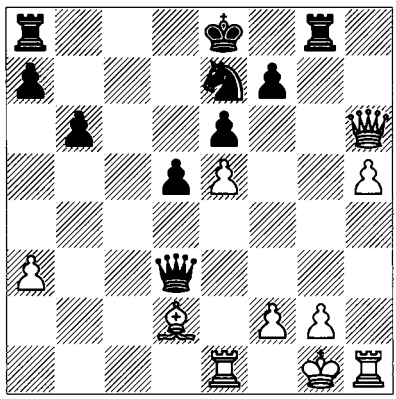
In several games Black played 12...♘ec6, with rather poor results, but it is more flexible to leave the knight on e7 where it can also exert an influence on the kingside. Spending a tempo on ...h6 is worthwhile because it prevents White from forcing further dark-squared weaknesses by playing h6 himself.

13 ♔f1 ♘xf3 14 ♕xf3 b6!

A typical move in the Winawer, aiming to exchange White's more active bishop by ...♗a6. Here it ensures Black full equality even though he is forced to surrender the g7-pawn.

15 ♕g3 ♗a6 16 ♕xg7 ♗xd3+ 17 cxd3 ♖g8 18 ♕xh6 ♕d4 19 ♖e1 ♕xd3+ 20 ♔g1

B



At first sight, things look good for White, with his passed h-pawn and Black's weak dark squares, but this is balanced by Black's active pieces and the fact that the white bishop is restricted by the e5-pawn. Curiously, Black has more chances in the middlegame since there the slightly awkward position of the white king is a factor, while White would prefer an endgame in which the passed h-pawn is an important asset.

20...♖c8?!

Allowing White to swap queens is a mistake; 20...♘f5 21 ♕f4 ♘d4 22 ♔h2 ♖c8 is more accurate.

21 ♗g5?

Too ambitious. It is easy to be seduced by the potential attacking power of the bishop, but 21 ♕e3 is correct, with a slight advantage after 21...♕xe3 22 ♖xe3 ♖c2 23 ♖d3.

21...♕f5 22 f4 ♖c2 23 ♖h2?

The only chance is 23 ♕f6 ♕xf6 24 exf6 ♘f5, when Black is no more than slightly better.

23...♕d3! 24 ♕f6 ♖xg5! 25 ♕xg5

After 25 fxg5 ♘f5, with the lethal threat of 26...♕d4+, White has no defence.

25...♕d4+ 26 ♔h1 ♕e3 0-1

27 ♖f1 and 27 ♕h4 are both met by the crushing 27...♖c1.

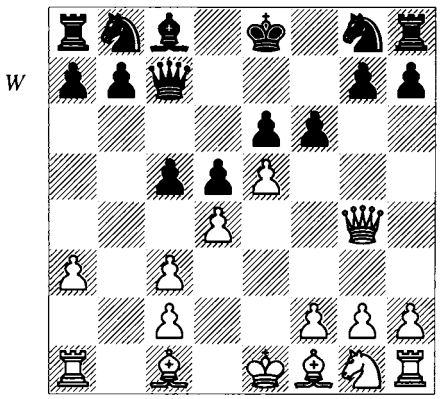
Sutovsky – Diachkov
Moscow 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♕c7

In this game Black develops his queen to the more modest square c7, allowing White to harass the g7-pawn.

7 ♕g4 f6?!

7...f5 is a sounder and more popular choice.



It may appear natural to challenge White's pawn-chain by attacking e5, but there is a danger that the position will open up to the benefit of White, who has the two bishops.

8 ♗b5+

This check is awkward for Black, since he cannot interpose on d7 due to ♕xe6+. He can play 8...♘c6, but this blocks the c-file and so rules out Black's threat of ...cxd4 followed by ...♕c3+, which he was counting on to gain time. That leaves the move played.

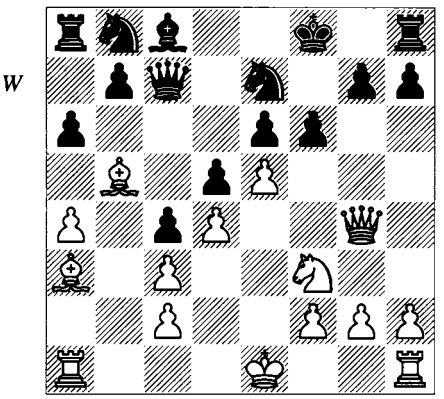
8...♔f8 9 ♘f3 c4?

Black cuts off the retreat of the b5-bishop and hopes to trap it with ...a6, but this move is too ambitious and fatally weakens the a3-f8 diagonal. 9...♕a5 is a better chance, but after 10 ♖b1 a6 (10...♕xc3+ 11 ♔d1 gives White a very dangerous initiative) 11 ♗e2! (11 ♗e8 g6 12 ♗xg6 hxg6 13 ♕xg6 ♕d8 is unclear) 11...♕xc3+ 12 ♗d2 ♕xc2 13 ♖c1 ♕e4 14 ♕g3 White has a strong initiative in return for the two pawns.

10 a4!

This little move is deadly, since the arrival of the dark-squared bishop on the a3-f8 diagonal stresses Black's position beyond its breaking point. In the Winawer, activation of White's dark-squared bishop is so important that he is often prepared to offer a pawn or two to achieve it, but in this case White accomplishes his aim without any sacrifice. It is remarkable that no fewer than 23 players have fallen into this trap (in 24 games, since one player fell into it twice!).

10...a6 11 ♗a3+ ♘e7



12 ♗e8!

The key move, saving the bishop.

12...♕d8?!

Now it's all over. However, even after the best continuation Black has negligible chances of saving the game: 12...♔xe8 (12...fxe5 13 ♕h5 g6 14 ♗xg6 ♔g7 15 ♗e8 ♘g6 16 ♗xg6 hxg6 17 ♕xe5+ gives White an extra pawn and a large positional advantage) 13 ♕xg7 ♖f8 (13...♖g8 14 ♕xh7 f5 15 ♗d6 ♕d7 16 h4, with ♘g5 to come, is also excellent for White) 14 exf6 ♖f7 15 ♕h8+ ♖f8 16 ♕xh7 ♖xf6 17 ♕h5+ ♘g6 18 ♘e5 ♕g7 19 g4 followed by g5 and White regains the piece with a massive advantage.

13 ♗h5

White has avoided material loss and now has a crushing lead in development to add to his pressure along the a3-f8 diagonal.

13...♘bc6 14 exf6 gxf6 15 ♘g5!

15 ♘e5! also wins.

15...♕a5

After 15...fxg5 16 ♕xg5 White mates in a few moves since Black cannot prevent ♕f6+.

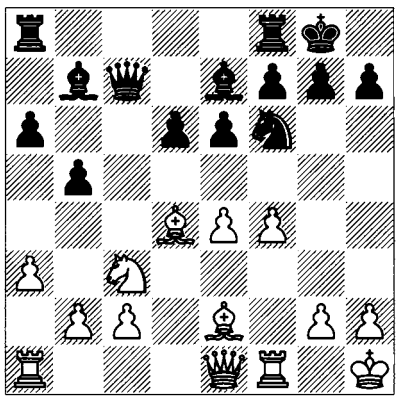
16 0-0 f5 17 ♕h4 1-0

Practically any move by the knight is a deadly threat, as the white queen then penetrates to f6. There is no defence.

85 Sicilian Scheveningen Structure

Zagrebelny – Ulybin
Abu Dhabi 2001

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 d6 6 ♗e2 ♗e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 f4 ♘c6 9 ♗e3 a6 10 ♔h1 ♕c7 11 ♕e1 ♘xd4 12 ♗xd4 b5 13 a3 ♗b7



The strategy for both sides is determined by the central pawn-structure, which is characteristic of the Sicilian Scheveningen. White has more space and the possibilities of e5 or f5 provide him with the making of a kingside attack. Black has three assets: his pressure against e4, his extra central pawn, which gives him the possibility of play by ...d5 or ...e5, and his chances to attack on the queenside by ...a5 and ...b4. In general, White's chances lie more in the short term, while Black, if he can survive White's kingside pressure, will have good long-term chances thanks to his central control and minority attack.

14 ♕g3 ♖ae8?!

This move is playable, but blocking in the f8-rook looks rather artificial. Black has a number of safer choices here, including 14...♗c6 15 ♖ae1 ♕b7, to increase the pressure on e4, 14...g6, to remove the potential mate on g7, and the flexible 14...♖ad8.

15 ♖ae1 ♗c6 16 ♗f3

16 ♗d3?! is inferior due to 16...e5! 17 fxe5 ♘h5 18 ♕h3 dxe5.

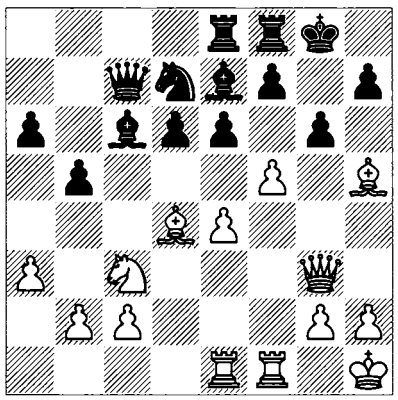
16...g6

The most commonly played move has been 16...♖d8, but few players have found the strong reply 17 ♘d5! exd5 18 exd5 ♗a8 19 ♖xe7! ♕xe7 20 ♖e1 ♕xe1+ 21 ♕xe1 ♘xd5 22 ♕g3 f6 23 h4, when White's active bishops and attacking chances count for more than Black's slight material advantage.

17 f5

This is awkward for Black since the obvious 17...e5 is met by 18 ♗e3 (threatening 19 ♗h6) 18...♔h8 19 ♗g5, followed by ♕h4, with a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

17...♘d7 18 ♗h5!



The threat to sacrifice on g6 may look primitive, but it's hard to meet.

18...e5?

18...exf5! 19 exf5 ♘e5 is the only chance, when it's hard for White to prove more than a slight advantage.

19 fxg6 fxg6 20 ♗xg6 hxg6 21 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 22 ♖f3! ♖xf3 23 ♕h5+

Not 23 gxf3?? ♘f6, refuting the attack.

23...♔g8 24 gxf3

White threatens both ♖g1+ and ♕xe8+, so Black must surrender material.

24...♗f6 25 ♕xe8+ ♘f8 26 ♖g1+ ♗g7 27 ♗b6! ♕b7

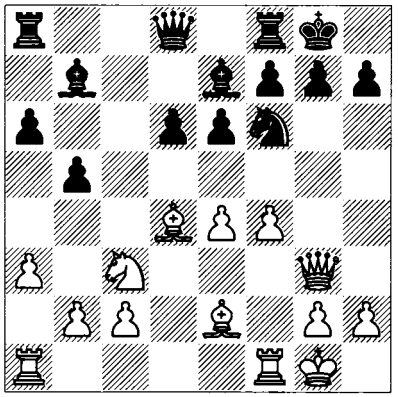
27...♕xb6 loses to 28 ♕e7, so White rescues his attacked bishop with gain of tempo.

28 ♕d8 ♕f7 29 ♖g3 ♕e6 30 ♕g5 ♕f7 31 ♘d5 ♘e6 32 ♕h4 ♔f8 33 ♗e3 ♔e8 34 ♕h7 ♗f8 35 ♕h8 ♗xd5 36 exd5 ♘g7 37 ♖xg7 ♕xg7 38 ♕xg7 ♗xg7 39 ♔g2 ♔f7 40 ♔g3 ♔g6 41 ♔g4 e4 42 b3 exf3 43 ♔xf3 ♗b2 44 a4 bxa4 45 bxa4 ♔f5 46 ♗f4 ♗a3 47 h4 1-0

Kamsky – Mamedyarov
Moscow 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 d6 7 0-0 ♘f6 8 ♗e3 ♗e7 9 f4 0-0 10 ♕e1?! ♘xd4 11 ♗xd4 b5 12 a3 ♗b7 13 ♕g3

B



The position is the same as after 14 ♕g3 in the previous example, except for the omission of the moves ...♕c7 and ♔h1. This difference favours Black, since by avoiding the tempo spent on ...♕c7 he can set his queenside play in motion more quickly, while missing out ♔h1 is a more serious deficiency, and indeed White plays it after a few moves in any case. It is for this reason that modern theory prefers 10 a4 or 10 ♔h1 instead of the old-fashioned 10 ♕e1.

13...g6!

This is the most awkward move as White has to decide at once how to protect e4.

14 ♗f3

14 ♗d3 is also met by 14...a5.

14...a5!

White has not completed his development but Black is already threatening ...b4. In many lines Black actually benefits from having missed out ...♕c7 since ♘xb5 doesn't attack the queen.

15 b4

White doesn't have a promising move and should already be playing for equality. However, this isn't so easy, because 15 ♘xb5 ♘xe4 16 ♕e1 d5 and 15 ♖ad1 b4 16 e5 ♗xf3 17 exf6 ♗xf6 18 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 19 ♖xf3 bxc3 20 ♖xc3 d5 both slightly favour Black due to his central majority. The move played prevents ...b4 but weakens the queenside and in particular the c4-square.

15...♖c8 16 ♖ad1 axb4 17 axb4 ♖c4 18 ♔h1

Black has no immediate threats, so White moves his king off the exposed g1-a7 diagonal.

18...♘d7

18...♖xb4?! 19 e5 ♘d5 20 ♘xd5 exd5 21 e6 unnecessarily gives White attacking chances.

19 ♗e2

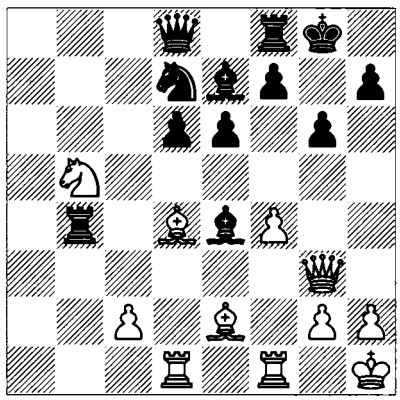
White decides on a tactical solution, forcing Black to take the b4-pawn.

19...♖xb4 20 ♘xb5?!

20 ♕e1 ♗h4 21 ♕d2 ♗c6 22 f5 gives White more chances of muddying the waters.

20...♗xe4

W



21 ♗g7

Ingenious, but inadequate. However, the alternative 21 ♗c3 ♖a4 22 ♘xd6 ♗xd6 23 ♖xd6 ♕c7 24 ♖d4 ♖xd4 25 ♗xd4 ♕xc2 leaves White with only slight compensation for the pawn.

21...♗xc2! 22 ♗xf8 ♕xf8

Black has a bishop and two central pawns for the rook; moreover, his pawns are in a compact mass. White is in trouble.

23 ♖d4 d5

23...♖b3! is even stronger.

24 ♖xb4 ♗xb4 25 ♖c1 ♗e4 26 ♖c7 ♕d8 27 ♕e3 ♕h4 28 ♕g3 ♕f6 29 ♕e3?

29 h3 offers more resistance.

29...♕a1+ 30 ♕c1 ♕a2

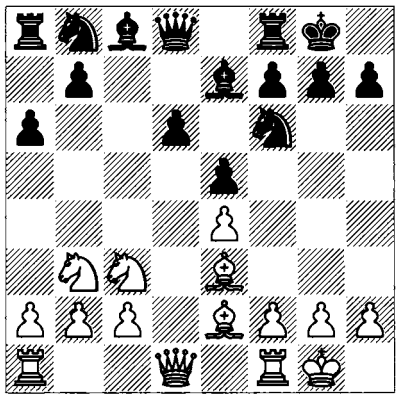
Black now also has a strong initiative.

31 ♖c8+ ♔g7 32 ♕d1 ♘f6 33 h3 ♗d2 34 ♕f1 ♗xf4 35 ♘c7 ♕d2 36 ♘e8+ ♘xe8 37 ♖xe8 ♕e3 38 ♗f3 ♗xf3 39 gxf3 ♕d2 40 ♕g1 ♕e2 0-1

86 Sicilian Najdorf Structure

Adams – Svidler
Baku 2008

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♗e3



We call this type of centre the Najdorf pawn-structure, although the same formation can arise in other lines of the Sicilian. The most obvious feature is Black's backward d-pawn, but for the moment the square in front of the pawn is not under White's control, so he has no immediate method of exploiting the potential weakness. Instead, White's strategy is to proceed slowly, first of all eliminating any possible counterplay by Black. Only then will White manoeuvre so as to take advantage of the d5-square.

9...♗e6 10 ♕d2 ♘bd7 11 a4 ♕c7 12 ♖fd1 ♖ac8 13 a5 ♖fe8

Black decides to proceed slowly. He has no active plan, since both ...d5 and ...b5 are impossible, so he develops his pieces to flexible squares and waits to see what White plans.

14 h3 h6 15 ♕e1 ♕b8?!

Black intends to use his rook on the c-file, but this activity is a mirage. The flexible 15...♗f8 is better.

16 ♗f3 ♖c4

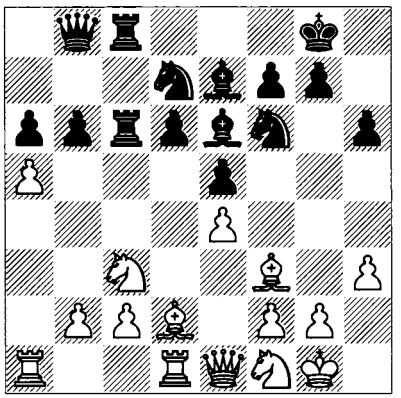
A key moment. White now finds an excellent plan to increase his grip on d5 by transferring his knight from b3 to e3.

17 ♘d2 ♖c6 18 ♘f1! ♖ec8 19 ♗d2

With White's hold on d5 rapidly consolidating, Black makes a bid for counterplay.

19...b6

Had Black played 19...b5, White would have continued 20 axb6 ♘xb6 21 ♗c1 with a clear advantage thanks to the d5-square and the weak a6-pawn. The move played gives White a second promising option, which Adams goes for.



20 ♘e3 bxa5 21 ♘cd5

White occupies d5 at once, since the a5-pawn will fall soon enough.

21...♗xd5

21...♗d8 22 ♗xa5 ♗xa5 23 ♖xa5 ♗xd5 24 exd5 ♖b6 25 b3 is also very good for White.

22 exd5 ♖c5 23 ♗xa5

The d5-square is now blocked by a pawn, but giving up his light-squared bishop has left Black with new weaknesses on f5 and ultimately c6.

23...e4 24 ♗e2 ♕xb2

With the a6-pawn falling, Black tries to maintain material equality, but now his queen runs into trouble.

25 ♗xa6 ♖b8 26 c3! ♖xa5

After 26...♘e5 27 ♗b4 ♖c7 28 ♖db1 White wins material, so in desperation Black surrenders the exchange.

27 ♖xa5 ♕b6 28 ♖da1

Adams had no problems exploiting his material advantage:

28...♘c5 29 ♗f1 ♕d8 30 ♖b5 ♖c8 31 ♖a7 ♘fd7 32 ♘f5 ♗f8 33 ♕e3 ♕f6 34 ♘g3 ♕e5 35 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 36 ♖xd7 ♖xc3 37 ♕e2 ♕d4 38 ♖d8! ♖c1 39 ♔h2 1-0

Since 39...♘d2 40 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 41 ♖b8+ leads to mate next move.

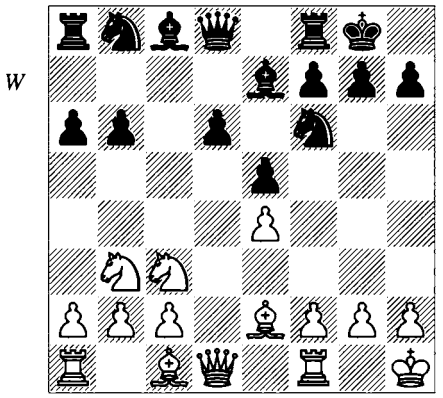
Dvoirys – Wang Yue
Cappelle la Grande 2007

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗e2 e5 7 ♘b3 ♗e7 8 0-0 0-0

Again the Najdorf pawn-structure, but rather than playing positionally as in the previous example, White adopts a more aggressive plan which retains the option of playing f4. While this puts more immediate pressure on Black, it also introduces the danger that White will become overextended.

9 ♔h1 b6

Black wishes to develop his bishop to b7 to exert pressure on e4, but if 9...b5, then 10 a4 b4 11 ♘d5 is a little awkward for him, hence the more modest text-move.



10 f4?

This is simply too ambitious. By leaving e4 weak, White offers Black too much counterplay. 10 f3 or 10 ♗e3 is better, reverting to the type of positional play seen in Adams-Svidler.

10...♗b7 11 ♗f3 ♘bd7

Now that Black has developed some pieces, he is ready to expand by ...b5. White takes steps to prevent this, but the downside is that he has to make another non-developing move.

12 a4 ♖c8

There's nothing wrong with this, but 12...b5 is also possible in any case, since after 13 axb5 axb5 14 ♖xa8 ♕xa8 the e4-pawn is under fire and Black stands well.

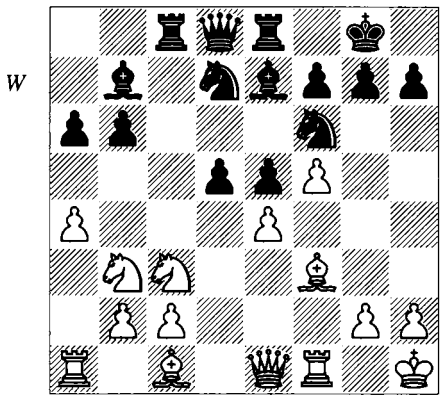
13 ♕e1 ♖e8

Black develops his last piece, while White not only has two undeveloped pieces on the queenside, but also an inactive knight on b3. The immediate threat is 14...d5! 15 exd5 ♗b4, putting White's position under terrible pressure.

14 f5

White has no good options. The position of his queen opposite Black's rook is a major source of concern, but 14 ♕g3 is met by the typical Sicilian exchange sacrifice 14...♖xc3! 15 bxc3 ♘xe4, which gives Black excellent compensation. White therefore decides to push his f-pawn to prevent Black from opening the e-file with ...exf4, but Black is able to smash the position open in any case.

14...d5!



When Black takes over the initiative with the Najdorf pawn-structure, this liberating move often allows his pieces to come to life.

15 exd5 e4! 16 ♘xe4

16 ♗xe4 ♗b4 wins material for Black, while after 16 ♗e2 ♗b4 17 ♕g3 e3 18 ♗xe3 ♗xc3 19 bxc3 ♖xc3 20 ♗d3 ♘e5 Black's raging initiative gives him a decisive advantage.

16...♗xd5 17 ♘c3 ♗c4 18 ♖g1

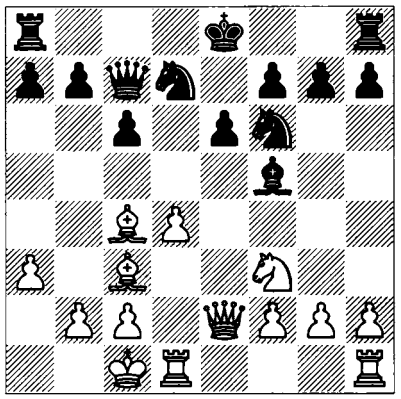
18 ♗e2 ♗b4 19 ♕d1 ♗xc3 20 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 21 bxc3 ♕c7 is also very good for Black.

18...♗xb3 19 cxb3 ♗c5

This forced tactical sequence leaves Black the exchange for a pawn up, a decisive advantage in a position that offers rooks so many active possibilities.

20 ♕g3 ♗xg1 21 ♗h6 ♘h5 22 ♗xh5 ♗d4 23 ♖d1 ♗e5 24 ♗f4 ♗xf4 25 ♕xf4 ♕e7 26 h3 ♘f6 27 ♗f3 ♖cd8 28 ♖f1 ♕e5 29 ♕b4 ♖d6 30 ♗e2 a5 31 ♕h4 ♖d4 32 ♕g5 h6 33 ♕c1 ♘e4 0-1

87 Caro-Kann Structure



Kobaliya – Loncar
European Ch, Rijeka 2010

This is a typical position with the Caro-Kann pawn-structure, which consists of d4 vs c6 and e6. It can arise from a range of openings, although the Caro and the Scandinavian are the most common. Here White has the two bishops and a slight space advantage, but Black's position is very solid and the lack of any likely pawn-breaks renders it hard for White to make progress. A key idea in such positions is to play ♘e5, which allows White to gain more space by advancing his kingside pawns.

12 ♘e5 h5?!

An inaccuracy, since it unnecessarily gives White the extra option mentioned in the following note. The correct move-order is 12...♘xe5 13 dxe5 ♘d5 14 ♗d2 0-0-0, which transposes to the game after 15 g4 ♗g6 16 f4 h5 17 h3.

13 h3?!

13 ♘xd7! is very awkward; for example, 13...♔xd7 (13...♕xd7? 14 d5! is disastrous for Black, while 13...♘xd7 14 d5 cxd5 15 ♗xd5 opens the position in favour of White's bishops) 14 d5! cxd5 15 ♗xf6 ♕f4+ 16 ♔b1 gxf6 17 ♗xd5! exd5 18 ♖xd5+ ♔c7 19 ♕e7+ ♔b8 20 g3 was very good for White in D.Howell-Kogan, Port Erin 2005.

13...♘xe5 14 dxe5 ♘d5 15 ♗d2 0-0-0 16 g4 ♗g6 17 f4

At first sight White is clearly better since he has the bishop-pair and appears to be gaining useful space on the kingside. However, Black's pieces are well placed and the bishop on d2 isn't exactly pulling its weight. Black has to keep his pieces on active squares, or the latent assets of White's position will become dominant.

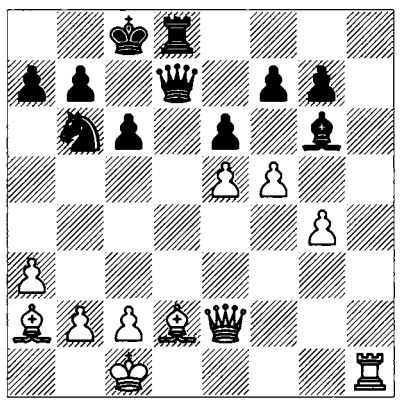
17...♘b6?

This move is wrong. Black voluntarily withdraws the knight from its forward post and at the same time blocks in his queen. 17...♕b6! is correct, keeping the knight on d5 and bringing the queen to a better position. After 18 ♖df1 (18 ♖hf1 hxg4 19 hxg4 ♕c5 20 ♗b3 ♖h3 is fine for Black) 18...hxg4 19 hxg4 ♖xh1 20 ♖xh1 ♕d4 White has no more than a microscopic edge.

18 ♗a2 hxg4 19 hxg4 ♖xh1 20 ♖xh1 ♕d7?

This allows White a tactical breakthrough. 20...♘d5 21 ♖f1 ♘e7 is better, holding up f5, although thanks to Black's waste of time White retains a definite advantage.

21 f5!



21...exf5 22 e6 ♕e7

After 22...♕c7 23 gxf5 ♗xf5 24 exf7 the advanced f-pawn will be decisive.

23 gxf5 ♗xf5 24 ♕e5!

Suddenly the exposed position of Black's king becomes the main factor.

24...fxe6

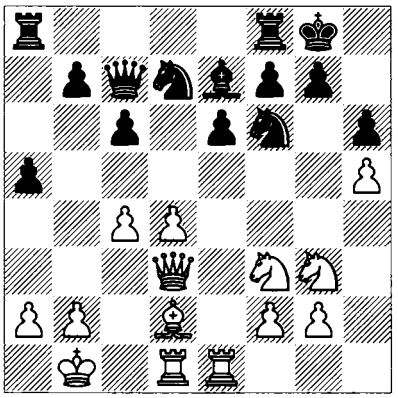
24...♖xd2 25 ♕xf5 g6 26 ♕f4 ♖d6 27 exf7 gives White a winning position.

25 ♗f4

There's no real defence to the threat of 26 ♕b8+ ♔d7 27 ♕c7+ ♔e8 28 ♖h8+.

25...♘d5 26 ♗xd5 cxd5 27 ♕b8+ ♔d7 28 ♕c7+ 1-0

Playing ♘e5 and advancing the kingside pawns doesn't always give White an advantage; indeed, in some cases it has precisely the opposite effect.



Leko – Ivanchuk
Morelia/Linares 2008

Again we have the Caro-Kann pawn-structure, but here the combination of minor pieces is somewhat different. White does not have the two bishops, but Black lacks the active light-squared bishop that he had in the previous example. Once again, ♘e5 is the only realistic method of making progress for White.

18 ♗c1?!

White should try 18 ♘e5 right away, although it is by no means certain that this secures an advantage.

18...♖fd8 19 ♕c2 a4 20 ♘e5?!

Now this is too late, but even 20 a3 ♗d6 21 ♘e4 ♘xe4 22 ♖xe4 b5!? leaves Black with a comfortable position.

20...♘xe5 21 dxe5 ♖xd1 22 ♕xd1 ♘d7 23 f4 ♘c5

Black has a slight advantage. The advance of White's kingside pawns, far from being a source of strength, has left gaping holes behind. In contrast to the previous example, Black's pieces are more actively posted and as pieces are exchanged, he is likely to be able to penetrate into White's position with his queen.

24 ♘e4

White hurries to swap off the well-placed knight, which might otherwise jump into d3 at some stage.

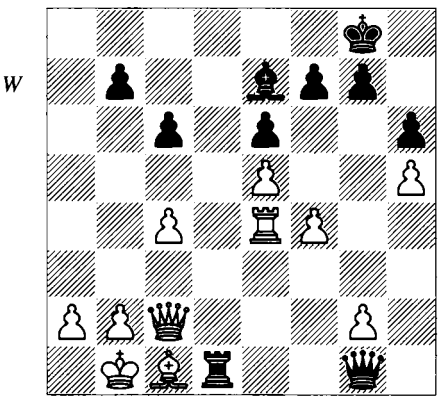
24...♖d8 25 ♕c2 ♘xe4 26 ♖xe4 ♕b6!?

An interesting idea. Ivanchuk offers a pawn to penetrate with his queen and exploit White's ragged kingside pawns.

27 ♕xa4?

Now Black's advantage becomes serious. 27 ♖e1 is better; Black has an advantage after 27...a3 28 b3 ♗b4 but White retains drawing chances.

27...♕g1 28 ♕c2 ♖d1



Black's grip on the position is worth far more than a pawn.

29 ♖e2 ♖f1 30 a3 ♗c5?!

Too subtle. 30...♖xf4 followed by returning to f1 would have regained the pawn while retaining the pressure.

31 ♕d2

31 ♖d2 ♗d4! 32 g3 c5 33 ♖d3 ♖e1 followed by ...♕f1 gives Black a winning position.

31...♖d1 32 ♕c2 ♗d4 33 c5

Or 33 ♖d2 ♖f1 and the f4-pawn falls, after which the e5-pawn is also doomed.

33...♖f1 34 ♖d2 ♖xf4 35 ♔a2?

White collapses. 35 ♕c4 ♗xe5 36 ♖d8+ ♔h7 37 ♕d3+ ♖f5 38 ♖d7 would have given him a fighting chance.

35...♖f2

White is left with a hopeless task, since his remaining pawns are so weak.

36 ♖xf2 ♗xf2 37 g4?!

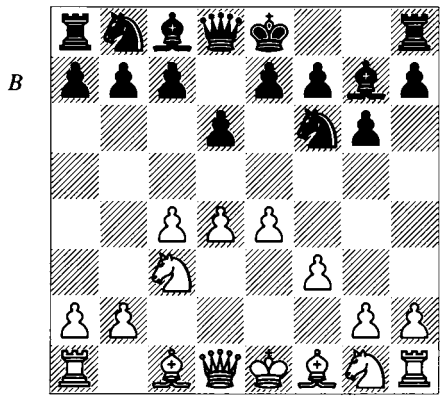
Only exposing the pawns further, but the position was lost in any case.

37...♗xc5 38 ♗f4 ♕d4 39 ♕d2 ♕e4 40 ♔a1 ♗d4 41 ♕h2 c5 42 ♔a2 b5 43 ♕d2 ♕d5+ 44 ♔b1 b4 45 a4 b3 46 ♕d3 c4 47 ♕e2 ♕h1+ 48 ♗c1 ♕a8 0-1

88 Sämisch King's Indian Structure

Bu Xiangzhi – Zviagintsev
Russian Team Ch, Dagomys 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3



White aims to build up a wide but solid centre, supported by the f3-pawn. He then has two possible plans: either continue positionally, aiming to maintain his space advantage into the middlegame, or use his central control as a basis for a kingside attack. Black must strive for counterplay by trying to break up White's centre and exploiting the slight lack of development that results from White's many pawn moves.

5...0-0 6 ♘ge2 a6

Black will attempt to punch holes in White's centre by a combination of ...b5 and ...e5.

7 ♗e3 ♘c6 8 ♕d2 ♗d7 9 h4

White decides to go for the kingside attack.

9...h5

A typical move to counter White's attack on the fianchetto position. Now if White wants to break through on the kingside, he must sacrifice a pawn with g4.

10 ♗h6 e5 11 0-0-0 b5 12 ♘d5

Threatening 13 ♘xf6+, since 13...♕xf6 is impossible due to 14 ♗g5.

12...♖e8 13 g4?!

White consistently pursues his attack, but this ultra-aggressive move might have rebounded. 13 dxe5 is safer, with approximate equality.

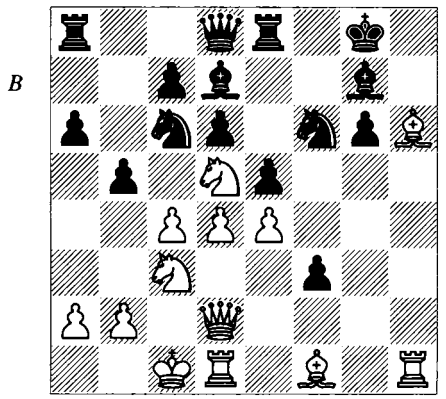
13...hxg4 14 h5 gxf3

14...♘xh5? is strongly met by 15 ♘g3! since 15...♘xg3? loses to 16 ♗xg7.

15 hxg6 fxg6

15...fxe2? 16 gxf7+ ♔xf7 17 ♗xe2 gives White a winning attack.

16 ♘ec3



16...♘xd4?

A natural but incorrect move. In such a position, the smallest mistake can prove fatal and now White has a long but more or less forced win. Black had two better lines:

1) 16...exd4 17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♘xf6 ♕xf6 19 ♘d5 ♕e5 20 ♕h6+ ♔f7 21 ♕h7+ ♕g7 22 ♖h4 ♘e5 23 ♖f4+ ♗f5 24 ♕xg7+ ♔xg7 25 exf5 c5 and Black's three pawns do not offer quite enough compensation for White's extra piece.

2) 16...♘g4! is the best defence; after 17 ♗g5 ♕c8! (17...♕b8? 18 ♗h3! b4 19 ♗xg4 bxc3 20 bxc3 ♗xg4 21 ♘f6+ ♔f7 22 ♘xg4 gives White a dangerous attack) 18 cxb5 axb5 19 ♘xb5 ♗e6 20 ♘bxc7 ♘xd4 the complications are in Black's favour.

17 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♘xf6 ♕xf6 19 ♘d5 ♕f8 20 ♕h6+ ♔f7 21 ♕g5 ♕g7

All Black's moves have been forced, and now White strikes with a deadly exchange sacrifice.

22 ♖xd4! exd4 23 ♕f4+ ♗f5

23...♔g8 24 ♘f6+ ♔f8 25 ♘g4+ ♔e7 26 ♖h7! is also winning for White.

24 exf5 g5 25 ♕g4 ♖e1+ 26 ♔d2 ♖ae8

26...♖xf1 27 f6 ♖xh1 28 ♕d7+ is lethal.

27 ♕h5+ 1-0

After 27...♔f8 28 f6 ♕g8 29 f7 ♕xf7 30 ♕h8+ ♕g8 31 ♕f6+ White mates.

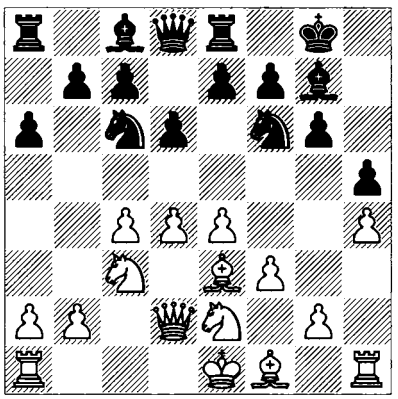
S. Kasparov – Bocharov
Bhubaneswar 2010

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 f3 g6 4 c4 ♗g7 5 ♘c3 0-0 6 ♗e3 ♘c6 7 ♘ge2 a6 8 h4

Normally White prefers 8 ♕d2, waiting to see Black's reply before deciding on a plan.

8...h5 9 ♕d2 ♖e8!?

An interesting alternative to the more usual 9...♖b8.



10 ♘c1

10 0-0-0 can be met by 10...b5 without the preparatory ...♖b8, since accepting the pawn sacrifice would open files against the white king. As 10 ♗h6 can be answered with 10...♗h8 (an option made possible by 9...♖e8), the move played is the most natural choice.

10...e5 11 d5 ♘d4 12 ♘b3 c5

Black is committed to his central action even if it involves a sacrifice. Exchanging knights on b3 leaves Black without any counterplay.

13 dxc6 bxc6

13...♘xc6 14 0-0-0 is dreadful for Black, so he must give up a pawn.

14 ♘xd4 exd4 15 ♗xd4 d5

Black has sacrificed a pawn and now hopes to exploit White's lagging development to obtain compensation. This is a typical idea when one side builds an ambitious pawn-centre; in this case White has spent four moves advancing his c-, d-, e- and f-pawns, and these moves cannot also be spent developing pieces. Black must strike quickly, since if White completes his development and reinforces his pawn-centre then he will have a stable space advantage.

16 cxd5 cxd5 17 e5 ♘d7 18 f4 f6 19 e6!?

19 ♗f2 ♗b7 20 0-0-0 fxe5 21 ♘xd5 ♘f6 gives Black excellent play for the pawn.

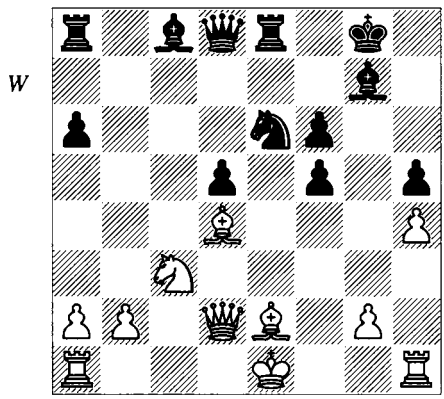
19...♘f8

After 19...♖xe6+ 20 ♗e2 Black's pieces are very clumsily placed.

20 f5

20 ♗e2? ♘xe6 is clearly good for Black, so White has little choice.

20...gxf5 21 ♗e2 ♘xe6



Black's active play has totally destroyed White's centre, but the game is far from over.

22 0-0?

Giving up any hope of an advantage. 22 0-0-0! is correct; after 22...♘xd4 23 ♕xd4 ♖e5 24 ♗f3 White will regain the pawn at d5 and retain some positional advantage.

22...♘xd4 23 ♕xd4 ♗h6

It turns out that White's king is poorly placed on g1 and Black can activate his bishop by an alternative route.

24 ♔h1 ♖e5 25 ♗xh5?

White should play 25 ♗f3 ♗e6 26 ♖fe1, with equal chances. Playing in the centre is more important than taking the irrelevant h5-pawn.

25...♗e3 26 ♕d3 ♖a7!

The rook is heading for h7, after which White will have even more cause to regret taking on h5.

27 ♗f3 ♖h7 28 g3 d4

It is now Black rather than White who has a superiority in the centre.

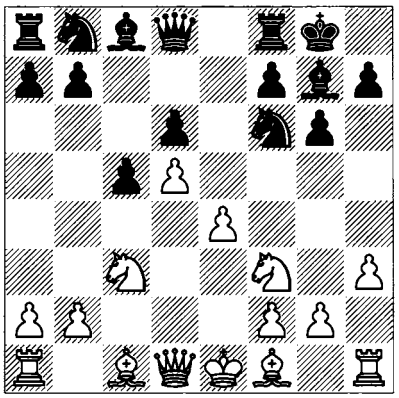
29 ♘e2 f4 30 ♘xf4 ♗xf4 31 gxf4 ♖e3 32 ♕g6+?! ♖g7 33 ♕h5 ♖xf3 0-1

It's all over after 34 ♕xf3 ♗b7 or 34 ♖xf3 ♗g4.

89 Benoni Structure

Yakovenko – Gashimov
Sochi 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 c5 4 d5 d6 5 ♘c3 exd5 6 cxd5 g6 7 h3 ♗g7 8 e4 0-0



This is the typical Benoni central pawn-structure. The most obvious point is that White has a central pawn-majority, while Black has one on the queenside. White's plan is twofold: he must try to restrain Black's queenside pawns (for example, by meeting ...a6 with a4) and prepare to advance in the centre (typically by f4 and e5). One not so obvious point is that the f3-knight is often transferred to c4; this clears the way for the f-pawn to advance and exerts pressure against the d6-pawn which in some lines may be intensified by ♗f4. In general, the long-term prospects tend to lie with White and it is up to Black to find a source of counterplay.

9 ♗d3 a6 10 a4 ♖e8 11 0-0 ♘bd7 12 ♖e1 b6?!

An unusual move. It's more common to play 12...♘h5, or move the queen to c7 or e7. By developing the bishop to b7, Black restrains a possible e5 by White (because d5 will be attacked). However, the bishop is passively placed on b7, and this plan does little to help Black develop queenside activity.

13 ♗f4 ♕c7 14 ♕d2 ♗b7 15 ♗c4!

Blockading the c-pawn prevents Black from moving any of his queenside pawns and so nullifies any possible counterplay.

15...♘h5 16 ♗h2 h6

This move says it all, but active play with 16...♘e5 allows a typical central breakthrough by 17 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 18 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 19 f4 ♖ee8 20 e5, when Black is in dire trouble.

17 ♖ad1 ♔h7 18 ♕c2!

White must decide on a way to make progress. This move clears d2 for the knight to be transferred to c4, an excellent plan which will force Black to defend d6 with another piece.

18...♖e7 19 ♗e2

Threatening to win at once by 20 e5! since after 20...♘xe5 21 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 the h5-knight is hanging. Thus Black has no time to play 19...c4.

19...♔g8 20 ♘d2

20 e5! is already very strong, but there is no harm in further preparation.

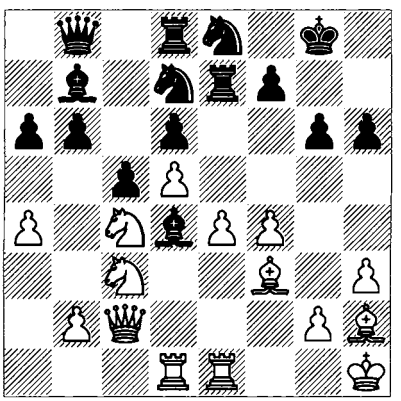
20...♘hf6 21 ♘c4 ♘e8

Black's knight has been driven back to e8 and White is now ready to advance in the centre.

22 f4 ♗d4+ 23 ♔h1 ♖d8

23...♘ef6 24 ♗f3 ♖ae8 is another line that runs into 25 e5!.

24 ♗f3 ♕b8

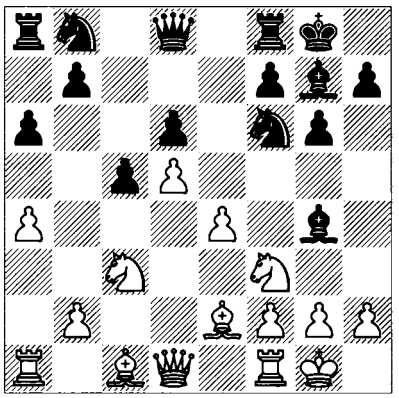


Up to here White has played powerfully and could now have wrapped up the game by the thematic breakthrough 25 e5! dxe5 26 fxe5 ♘xe5 27 ♖e2! (not 27 ♖xd4? due to 27...♘xf3!) with the deadly threat of 28 ♖xd4 cxd4 29 ♖xe5. Indeed, Black is so tied up that White can even improve his position before taking on d4.

In the game White played **25 ♘e2?** and did eventually win (1-0, 52) although the path was by no means smooth.

L.B. Hansen – Gelfand
Dresden Olympiad 2008

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 a4 ♗g4 9 ♗e2 ♗g7 10 0-0 0-0



This is a slightly different line from Yakovenko-Gashimov. In the current game White did not play h3, which allowed Black to develop his light-squared bishop to a natural square. As the above-mentioned game proved, this piece can become a real problem for Black if it fails to find a satisfactory post.

11 ♖e1

An unusual move (more common alternatives are 11 ♗f4, 11 ♘d2 and 11 h3). White's idea is to play his bishop back to f1 so that he can take on f3 with the queen. This leaves the bishop on the f1-a6 diagonal, where it can restrain Black's queenside pawns. The defect is that the plan is very slow and, as it turns out, does not totally prevent Black's queenside activity.

11...♖e8 12 ♗f1 ♘bd7 13 h3 ♗xf3 14 ♕xf3 ♖c8

There isn't an effective way for White to prevent ...c4, since after 15 ♗c4 ♘e5 16 ♕e2 ♘xc4 17 ♕xc4 ♘d7 (threatening 18...♘e5) 18 f4 ♕a5 followed by ...♕b4 Black's lead in development is the most important factor.

15 ♕d1 c4

Opening a path for the d7-knight to reach b3.

16 ♖a3?!

Aiming to avoid the attack on the rook after the coming ...♘b3, but this artificial move puts the rook offside.

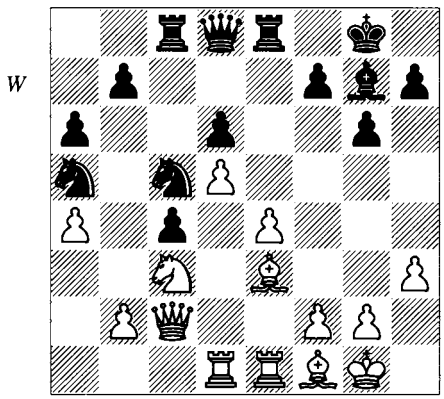
16...♘c5 17 ♕c2 ♘b3

17...♕a5!, threatening 18...♘xd5, is even more effective, since 18 ♗xc4 is strongly met by 18...♘fxe4, while 18 ♗d2 ♘b3 is also unpleasant for White.

18 ♗e3 ♘a5

This retreating move is more or less forced as White was threatening to play 19 ♗xc4.

19 ♖aa1 ♘d7 20 ♖ad1 ♘c5



Now Black's other knight arrives to exert pressure against White's queenside.

21 g3 ♕d7!

A good practical decision. Black can win a pawn by 21...♗xc3 22 bxc3 ♖xe4, but giving up the fianchettoed bishop leaves Black's kingside weak and offers White long-term compensation for the pawn. The move played is better since it maintains the pressure and prepares to make further progress on the queenside by ...b5.

22 ♔h2 b5 23 axb5 axb5 24 ♗xc5?

Now there is nothing to oppose the power of the enemy bishop on the long diagonal. 24 h4, intending ♗h3, is much better, activating the otherwise dead bishop on f1.

24...♖xc5 25 ♘a2

White prevents ...b4 for the moment, but Black's queenside pressure and piece activity give him a large advantage.

25...♖cc8 26 ♘b4 ♕a7 27 f4 ♕c5 28 ♘a6 ♕b6 29 ♘b4 c3! 30 e5 cxb2 31 ♕xb2 ♘c4 32 ♗xc4 bxc4 33 ♘d3 ♕a5 34 ♘f2 dxe5 35 fxe5 c3 36 ♕c2 ♖xe5 37 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 38 d6 ♖d8 39 ♘e4 ♕b4 40 ♖e1 ♕d4 41 ♕b3 ♖xd6 42 ♖f1 ♖d7 0-1

Typical Mistakes

The final part of the book looks at some typical middlegame mistakes. Some of these involve oversights or miscalculations, others are based on misjudgements, while some are purely psychological. All are important, because chess is not solely a game of technique, strategy and calculation. It doesn't help to have the finest positional understanding if, having obtained a winning position, you then make a basic oversight.

The first section discusses the psychology of traps. Gosling-Rudd (page 216) is a typical example. White, in a winning position, plays what looks like a decisive mating continuation and ends up being mated himself. Li Chao-Bu Xiangzhi (page 217) is a more complex case. Black offers a piece in what looks like a simple miscalculation. White evidently thought so, because he snapped up the offered piece but ran into a forced mate. It's important to understand just why it's so easy to make mistakes like these, and to be aware of the 'danger signals' which indicate that special care needs to be taken.

It's easy to misjudge attacks. In the mid-19th century it was generally believed that a well-played attack would almost always succeed, but improvements in defensive technique eventually led to a more realistic assessment of attacks. However, it's possible to go too far the other way, and to think that no attack can succeed unless it is carried out with overwhelming force. Kanarek-Swiercz (page 218) shows a typical misjudgement. In order to achieve his strategic aims, White moved a defensive piece away from the kingside, leaving it entirely unprotected. Black responded with a straightforward but effective attack which led to a decisive gain of material. A particular problem arises when your opponent launches a crude attack. Instead of playing 'properly', your opponent simply sends his pieces in the direction of your king. It's one thing to know that an attack is unjustified, but another to counter it over the board. Some crude attacks aren't as dubious as they look, and just because an attack appears primitive doesn't mean that it lacks all poison. In Hamdouchi-Zhigalko (page 219), Black reacted poorly to White's impudent attack and was soon in trouble.

The next section deals with the opposite type of misjudgement. Some players love attacking and sacrificing, and lose their objectivity when they spot a possible 'brilliancy'. These players tend to make three types of mistake. The first occurs when they have a strong attack which they could press home by normal means. But just winning isn't good enough for them; they want to win brilliantly. Even very strong players can fall victim to this type of thinking and Spielmann-Nimzowitsch (page 220) is a good example. The second type of mistake is to start an attack that is not justified by the position. In Vidmar-Marshall (page 221), White stood better, but instead of continuing quietly he started pushing his kingside pawns towards the enemy king. Given the fluid nature of the position, this was unlikely to succeed and indeed Black soon took the initiative. The third typical error is to overlook a tactical defence. Attacking players are usually very good at spotting their own tactical possibilities, but less good at noticing similar ideas for their opponents. In Stefansson-Carlsen (page 222), White sacrificed a piece for an attack that looked sufficient for rough equality, but Carlsen's clever tactical riposte refuted White's idea. Tiviakov-Le Quang (page 223) was even more dramatic. White launched an imaginative attack based on a piece sacrifice, but at the crucial moment, with several pieces hanging and White threatening mate in one, Black struck with a deadly tactical blow.

It's possible to misevaluate other factors. Some players place too much value on material and tend to undervalue factors such as a lead in development or king safety. Such players have a tendency to grab 'hot' pawns, even in very risky situations. Najdorf-Portisch (page 224) is an example, in which Black took two pawns in the opening, only to fall victim to a vicious attack. Tomashevsky-Morozevich (page 225) is a marginal case and shows that there's no clear dividing line between 'risky' and 'safe' when it comes to pawn-grabbing.

Misevaluation of positional factors is also rather common. Fifty years ago the two bishops were valued very highly. Many instructional manuals extolled the benefits of the bishop-pair, and players

such as Gligorić and Portisch would smash the Nimzo-Indian time and time again. These days we have a more balanced viewpoint. In most positions the two bishops do constitute an advantage, but there are a large number of exceptions. In Vidmar-Nimzowitsch (page 226), from as long ago as 1927, White was determined to keep his bishops, even though they didn't have many active prospects. Nimzowitsch, a knight man if ever there was one, showed that the dynamic potential of his position more than compensated for the bishops. Portisch-Browne (page 227) shows how the bishop-pair can be humbled in the Nimzo-Indian.

Many players react to a sacrifice by accepting it with little or no thought. The logic is that if the opponent has captured, say, a pawn, then it's pointless to play on a pawn down for nothing so one might as well accept and see what happens. There are positions in which this logic is reasonable, but in many cases there is an alternative to the immediate capture. An intermediary move might change the situation, or the sacrifice can be declined and the tempo used somewhere else. Even if declining the sacrifice means playing on a pawn down, anything is better than a forced mate. In Galliamova-Morozevich (page 228), White offered a bishop, and Black accepted it even though this resulted in a forced loss. Declining the sacrifice and using the tempo for counterplay would have led to a draw. Black fared better in Plenca-Prohaszka (page 229), where White's standard ♗xh7+ sacrifice was unexpectedly declined.

Even very strong players suffer from lack of alertness. There aren't many games in which a player slides steadily downhill to defeat without at some stage having the opportunity to arrest the decline. The difficulty lies in spotting the opportunity, which may only exist for a fleeting moment. Grachev-A.Kovačević (page 230) looks like a typical white win against the Benoni, with Black's counterplay proving insufficient to counteract White's strategic advantages. However, there was one moment when, by means of a surprising sacrifice, Black could have held the balance. In Anand-Shirov (page 231), a mistake by White gave Black an opportunity to win the game with an unusual combination, but Shirov missed it and went down to defeat.

The next section is called 'Allowing a Swindle', which is rather different from the earlier section on falling into traps. A trap is usually a one-move trick, while a swindle can be a more drawn-out reversal of fortunes. There are many reasons for making a mess of a winning position, but one of the most common is failing to keep it simple. Hebden-Nunn (page 232) is typical; White had a choice between various lines, all of which won rather comfortably, but in the end chose one that only made the win harder. Further errors eventually handed the game to Black. Giri-Aronian (page 233) shows a different type of error. Black, in a bad position, decided to give up a piece for a little counterplay, but White didn't seem to take Black's possibilities seriously and instead of simply developing and keeping his pieces active, he allowed Black to develop unnecessary counterplay.

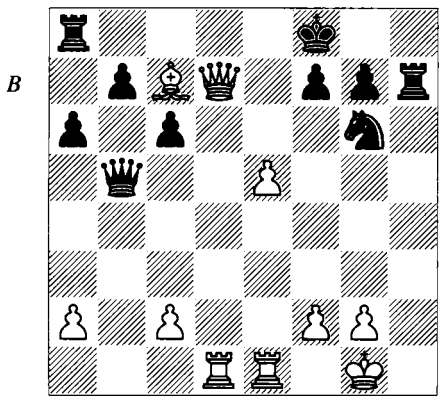
'Losing the Thread' refers to the situation where everything has been going smoothly and then suddenly you have no idea how to proceed. No available plan looks promising, and the result is a series of aimless moves and an abrupt downturn in your position. Ljubojević-Nakamura (page 234) is typical in that White, who initially stood quite well, suddenly lost the thread and was soon in a lost ending. The usual cause of losing the thread is a failure to grasp the key points of the position. In Azarov-Movsesian (page 235), both players failed to appreciate the importance of activating the h3-bishop.

Finally, **don't give up**. Having the will-power to look for the best way to cause your opponent difficulties, no matter how bad the position, is worth a great deal in chess. Very resourceful and determined players often seem to have a great deal of 'luck', but such players improve their chances by searching for counterplay, setting traps and not allowing clear-cut wins. Even the most resourceful player can't win a lost position if his opponent plays well, but being ready to pounce on the slightest inaccuracy is the key to notching up half-points or even whole points from apparently hopeless positions. In Ganguly-Shirov (page 236), Black lost the exchange for practically nothing, but his fight-back to eventual victory is worth looking at closely. Short-Nunn (page 237) also looks very bad for Black, since he is a pawn down with a dubious position. However, White made a mistake by taking a second pawn and Black suddenly had chances which he exploited to eventually win the game.

90 Falling into Traps

We've all fallen into a trap at some point. Beguiled by the prospect of some crushing-looking move, we have rushed ahead, only to be rocked back by the reply. The point here is that we have lost not because of some difficult tactic beyond our normal range of tactical vision, but by failing to see something that we would normally spot without difficulty. If the position had been in a 'find the next move' section in a magazine, we would likewise have seen the idea. So why do players miss relatively simple tactical points?

There are several reasons, but it's worth illustrating these by means of an example.



Gosling – Rudd
Frome 1994

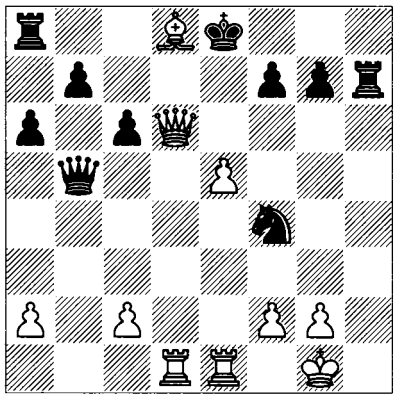
It's Black to play and a quick glance is enough to show that his position is very bad indeed. Material is equal, but Black's king is horribly exposed, his rook on a8 is playing no part in the game and White has the crushing threat of e6, amongst other possibilities. Black, it is true, has a rook on the open h-file, but he is unable to play his queen to the h-file quickly enough to make any difference, since White's threats are immediate. In fact, White is simply winning here, but events took an unexpected course.

21...♘f4

This looks like a perfectly plausible move. The knight covers e6, thereby preventing the e-pawn's advance, and it sets up the possibility of ...♘e2+ at some stage.

White saw that by checking on d6 he could force Black's king to e8, since moving to g8 allows a back-rank mate after ♕d8+. This immediately suggests the line White played, which takes advantage of the fact that Black's knight is no longer guarding e7.

22 ♕d6+ ♔e8 23 ♗d8??



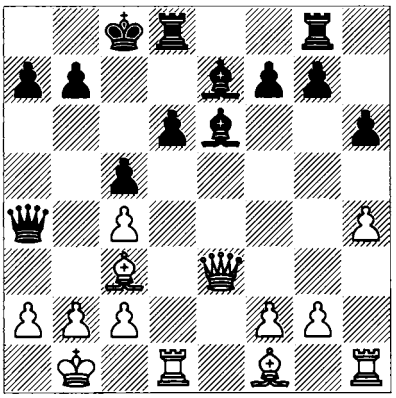
Threatening mate in one. It looks as if Black must play 23...♘g6, after which 24 e6 leads to a quick mate.

23...♕f1+! 0-1

A nasty surprise for White, who suddenly finds that he is facing mate himself by 24 ♖xf1 ♘e2# or 24 ♔xf1 ♖h1#.

Why was 21...♘f4 such an effective trap? The first reason is plausibility; White has the crushing threat of e6, and ...♘f4 looks like a typical last-ditch attempt to hold it up. This disguises the fact that it had a second, hidden, purpose. The second point is that most white moves don't stop Black's threat, so unless White actually sees the queen sacrifice, he's unlikely to play a move that nullifies it. The third point is that it isn't actually that easy to find a clear-cut win after 21...♘f4. There is one, but it's hard to see: 22 ♕d6+ ♔e8 (thus far as in the game) 23 ♖e3! ♘e2+ 24 ♖xe2 ♕xe2 25 ♕d7+ ♔f8 26 ♗b8!!, threatening mate on d8, and meeting 26...♖xb8 by 27 ♕d6+ and 28 ♕xb8+. The lack of an obvious alternative encourages White to go for the quick and easy kill, which turns out only to lead to self-destruction. Finally, Black isn't losing anything by setting the trap since his position is objectively hopeless in any case.

Now let's look at a deeper trap.



Li Chao – Bu Xiangzhi
Chinese Ch, Xinghua Jiangsu 2009

This position is slightly better for White. The attack on the g7-pawn prevents Black from moving his king's rook to e8. Black cannot play 16...g6 because the h6-pawn is hanging, while after 16...g5 17 hxg5 hxg5 18 ♗d3 the h1-rook has been brought into the game. Of course Black can't play 16...♗xc4? due to 17 b3.

Thus it looks as though Black has nothing better than a quiet move such as 16...♔b8, but after 17 ♗d3 things are again looking promising for White. He will play b3 to defend the c4-pawn with gain of tempo, and then ♗h7 followed by ♗e4, causing Black to waste a tempo defending the g7-pawn, while White transfers his bishop to a square which increases his grip on d5.

Let's see what Black actually played.

16...d5!?

A very surprising move, because after an exchange on d5 the e7-bishop will be hanging. At any rate, White doesn't have much choice about taking on d5.

17 cxd5 ♗xd5

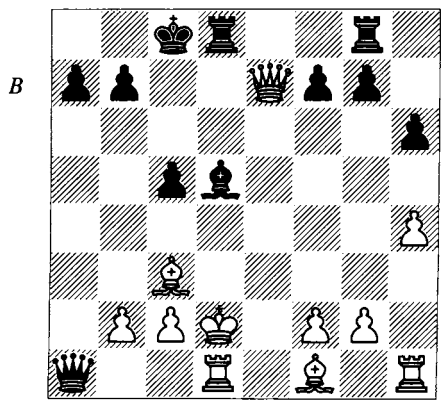
This is the moment of truth for White. Can he take the bishop? It's important when making such decisions not only to analyse the key line carefully, but also to look at what other possibilities are available. First of all, suppose White plays 18 ♕xe7. Then taking on a2 with the bishop doesn't look promising because after 18...♗xa2+ 19 ♔c1 ♖xd1+ 20 ♔xd1 ♖d8+ 21 ♔c1 Black's checks peter out (21...♕f4+ can be met by 22 ♕e3). Note that Black has to operate with checks because otherwise White can take on c5 with check, which is very awkward. So, how about the queen capture: 18...♕xa2+ 19 ♔c1 ♕a1+ 20 ♔d2 and now Black has a discovered check, but this does surprisingly little damage because his queen is hanging. Perhaps the best he can manage is 20...♗f3+ 21 ♗d3 ♗xd1 22 ♖xd1, but then the queen has to move, after which White takes on c5 with an obviously winning position. So there's a bit of a mystery here, since Black appears to have no reasonable continuation after 18 ♕xe7.

This should have been enough to warn White that there might be something wrong with the above analysis. Black didn't have to play 16...d5, and the fact that he chose it suggests that he had seen something. Of course, it's possible that Black miscalculated in some way, but it is certainly suspicious, and should have encouraged White to take a second look at his analysis.

Instead of capturing the bishop, White has a promising positional continuation in 18 b3 ♕c6 19 ♗d3 ♖ge8 20 ♗f5+ ♔b8 21 ♗xg7 and Black is in trouble since 21...♗xg2 22 ♖he1 gives White a large advantage – at the very least Black will lose the h6-pawn.

In the game, the lure of the bishop proved too much for White:

18 ♕xe7?? ♕xa2+ 19 ♔c1 ♕a1+ 20 ♔d2

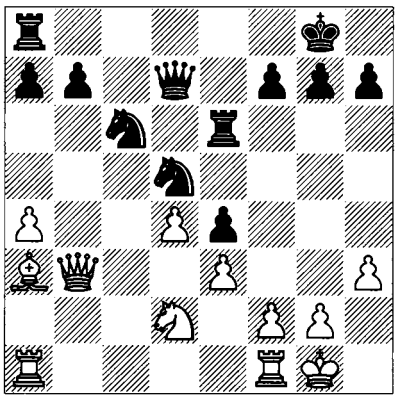


Now White received a shock.

20...♕xd1+! 0-1

The finish is 21 ♔xd1 ♗f3++ and 22...♖d1#. This is an object lesson in taking care with analysis, especially when it appears that your opponent has blundered.

91 Underestimating an Attack



Kanarek – Swiercz
Polish Ch, Warsaw 2011

This position is roughly level. Black has some attacking chances against White's slightly exposed kingside, but so long as he is attacking with just his rook and queen, White shouldn't have too many worries. White has the advantage on the queenside and can use his rooks to exert pressure along the b- and c-files. The various advantages and disadvantages roughly balance each other.

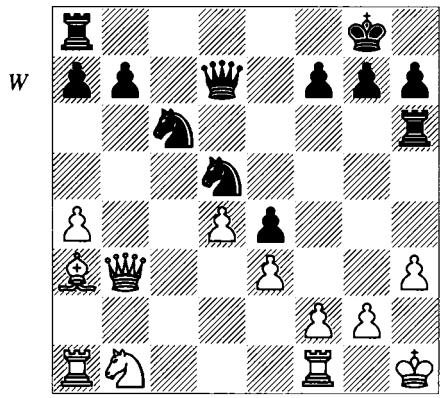
However, it's easy to become complacent about Black's attacking prospects. The development of defensive technique sometimes leads to the impression that no crude attack can succeed, but this is far from the truth. Just because an attack lacks subtlety doesn't mean it won't break through, and it's important not to be blind to the possible danger. Strong defensive players are well aware of their opponent's attacking potential and plan a long time in advance to nullify any threats. Less skilled players often follow the dubious strategy of simply ignoring their opponent's attack until the threats demand attention, but by then it may be too late.

19 ♘b1?

Exchanging the blockading knight on d5 is a worthy strategic objective, but this plan is not only very slow but also prevents the knight from performing any defensive duties on the kingside. 19 ♖ab1 b6 20 ♖fc1 is logical, followed by ♕b5. This increases White's queenside pressure while leaving the knight in position to help defend the kingside by ♘f1 if necessary. White's choice seriously underestimates Black's attacking potential on the kingside, a misjudgement for which he pays dearly.

19...♖g6 20 ♔h1 ♖h6

Targeting the protruding pawn on h3.



21 ♘c3?

White remains oblivious to the danger. This move is consistent, but consistency is of no benefit if you allow your opponent a forced win. The best chance is to retract the previous move by 21 ♘d2, but the loss of time gives Black the advantage. He can continue 21...♖e8 22 ♖fc1 ♖ee6 23 ♘f1 ♖eg6 24 ♘g3 ♖xh3+! 25 ♔g1 (25 gxh3 ♕xh3+ 26 ♔g1 ♘xd4 27 exd4 ♘f4 28 ♖c8+ ♕xc8 gives Black three pawns and a strong attack for the piece) 25...♖hxg3! 26 fxg3 h5 27 ♖c5 ♘f6 28 ♖ac1 ♕g4, with excellent compensation for the exchange.

21...♘xd4!

This sacrifice allows Black to add a knight to his attack, after which White's king has no survival chances. 21...♖xh3+! is equally good since 22 gxh3 loses to 22...♕xh3+ 23 ♔g1 ♘xd4.

22 exd4

Or 22 ♕xd5 ♖xh3+ 23 ♔g1 ♕xd5 24 ♘xd5 ♘e2#.

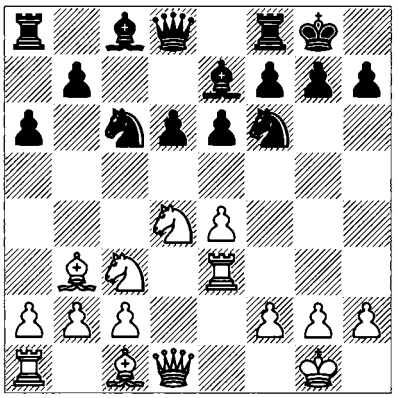
22...♖xh3+ 23 ♔g1

After 23 gxh3 ♕xh3+ 24 ♔g1 ♘f4 Black forces mate.

23...♖xc3 24 ♕b5 ♕xb5 25 axb5 ♖b3 26 ♖fb1 ♖xb1+ 27 ♖xb1 f6 28 ♖c1 ♔f7 29 f3 exf3 0-1

Hamdouchi – Zhigalko
Spanish Team Ch 2010

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♗c4 e6 7 0-0 ♗e7 8 ♖e1 0-0 9 ♗b3 ♘c6 10 ♖e3!?



Playing the rook to g3 looks like a beginner's idea, and one of the problems when facing a move like this is to take it seriously. All the books remind us that an attack launched without proper preparation cannot succeed, and this seems to be a perfect example of a premature attack, since White's queenside is still largely at home, while Black has not weakened his kingside in a way which could justify White's play. But while the ♖e3-g3 plan shouldn't give White any advantage, it's wrong to totally dismiss it. On the plus side, White might be able to develop his c1-bishop directly to the aggressive square h6 and, while the rook manoeuvre costs some time, White hasn't made an irrevocable commitment to an attack. It's easy to fall into the trap of trying to punish a move like ♖e3 and as a result play too hard for an advantage.

10...♗d7 11 ♖g3 ♘xd4?!

This is already a small slip, as it allows White to develop his bishop at h6. 11...♖e8 12 ♗h6 g6 or simply 11...♔h8 is better.

12 ♗h6!

White is alert and exploits the inaccuracy.

12...♘e8

A slightly unfortunate necessity. 12...♘xb3?? loses to 13 ♗xg7 and 12...g6? drops the exchange after 13 ♗xf8, so Black is obliged to retreat his knight.

13 ♕xd4 ♗f6 14 ♕d2 ♖c8 15 ♖d1 ♗e5?!

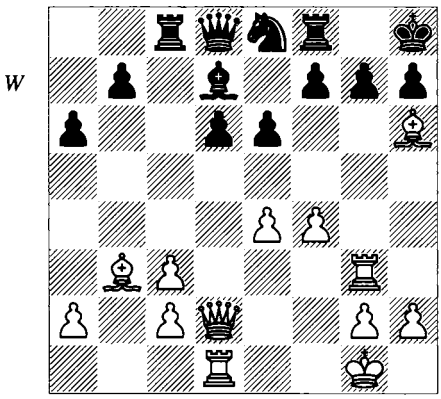
The start of a misguided plan which involves the exchange of Black's important defensive bishop. For the moment White has no serious threats, so Black could play a natural move on the queenside, such as 15...b5 or 15...♗c6.

16 f4 ♗xc3 17 bxc3

White's pawns have been doubled, but the e8-knight is now performing a double defensive duty by guarding both d6 and g7.

17...♔h8??

This terrible mistake by a player rated almost 2600 can only be explained by the disconcerting effect of White's cheeky play. Unable to refute White's plan, Black decides to expel the bishop from h6, but chooses the worst possible moment to unpin the g-pawn. 17...♕b6+ 18 ♔h1 f5 looks very risky but is actually the best chance. Admittedly Black weakens the a2-g8 diagonal but he prevents the further advance of White's f-pawn. After 19 exf5 ♖xf5 20 ♕e1 White retains some advantage but Black has defensive chances.



18 ♕xd6!

Taking the queen allows mate in two, so Black loses a pawn and his position is wrecked.

18...♖g8 19 ♕xd7 ♕xd7 20 ♖xd7 gxh6 21 e5?!

The obvious 21 ♖xf7 is simpler.

21...♖xg3 22 hxg3 ♖c7 23 ♖d8 ♖e7 24 c4 ♔g7 25 c5 ♘c7 26 c4 a5 27 ♖d6?

27 c6 bxc6 28 ♖d6 wins comfortably.

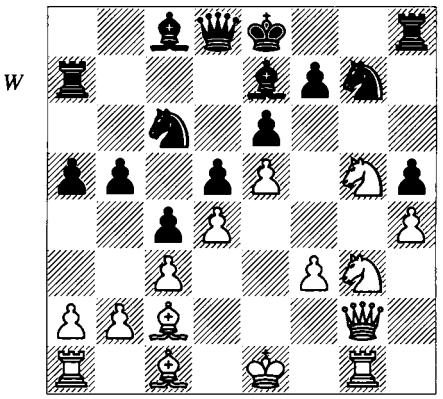
27...♘a6 28 c6 ♘c5 29 ♔f2 ♘xb3?

29...bxc6 30 ♖xc6 ♘xb3 31 axb3 ♖b7 offers drawing chances.

30 ♖d7! ♖e8 31 c7 ♖c8 32 axb3 1-0

92 Overestimating an Attack

Overestimating an attack can manifest itself in various ways. One of the most common is for a player who has a promising attacking position to have a sudden rush of blood to the head and start sacrificing material without calculating the consequences.



Spielmann – Nimzowitsch
New York 1927

This position is lost for Black. His pieces are in disarray, his king is exposed and White's major pieces dominate the g-file. Black, on the other hand, is several moves away from creating a threat on the queenside. Spielmann decided on a double piece sacrifice with ♘xf7 followed by ♘xh5, but even without any calculation this looks dubious, because by taking the h4-pawn with check Black can introduce the a7-rook into the defence with gain of tempo.

19 ♘xf7?

The defects of Black's position are so serious that a single move isn't going to put them right, so Alekhine's suggestion of 19 ♔e2! is the simplest. Now the capture on h4 is not check, so there is a genuine threat of 20 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 21 ♘f5 (21 ♘xh5 also wins) 21...♘xf5 22 ♕g6+ ♔f8 23 ♗xf5 exf5 24 ♗h6+ ♖xh6 25 ♕g8#. Black can't do much about this; for example, 19...♗f8 20 ♘h7 heads for f6, while after 19...♖g8 20 ♘h7 ♘f5 21 ♗xf5 exf5 22 ♗g5 White exchanges bishops and again plants his knight on f6. In both cases White has a winning position.

19...♔xf7 20 ♘xh5?

White's position was so strong that even here he could have secured a large advantage by the correct continuation 20 ♘e4!:

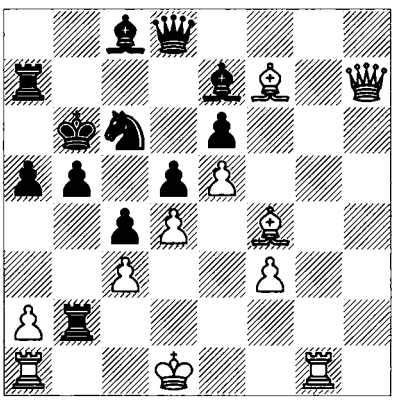
1) 20...♘f5 21 ♕g6+ ♔f8 22 ♘g5 ♗xg5 23 ♗xg5 ♖g7 24 ♗xd8 ♖xg6 25 ♖xg6 ♘xd8 26 ♗xf5 exf5 27 ♖d6 leads to a very favourable ending for White. One line is 27...♔e7 28 ♔f2 ♖g8 29 a4 bxa4 30 ♖xd5 ♗d7 31 ♖xa5, with a material and a positional advantage for White.

2) 20...♗xh4+ 21 ♔e2 ♘e8 (21...♔g8 22 ♘d6 ♕f8 23 ♕h3 ♗e7 24 ♖xg7+ ♕xg7 25 ♘xc8 attacks both a6 and e6) 22 ♘d6+ ♔e7 23 ♕h3 ♘xd6 24 ♕xh4+ ♔d7 25 ♖g7+ ♘e7 26 exd6 ♔xd6 27 ♗g5 with enormous pressure in return for the pawn.

20...♗xh4+ 21 ♔e2 ♘xh5 22 ♗g6+ ♔e7 23 ♗xh5 ♔d7

Now it's clear that things have gone very wrong for White. Black's king has fled the danger zone, while White remains a piece down.

24 ♕g7+ ♗e7 25 ♗f7 ♖h2+ 26 ♔d1 ♔c7 27 ♗f4 ♖xb2 28 ♕h7 ♔b6



The black king's trek is over.

29 ♖g8 ♕c7 30 ♕h8 ♘d8 31 ♗g6 ♖g2

31...b4 wins more quickly, but Black's advantage is so great that he can afford inaccuracies.

32 ♕h1 ♖xg6 33 ♖xg6 b4 34 ♖g7 ♕c6 35 ♕h8 ♕a4+ 36 ♔e1 ♘c6 37 ♕xc8 ♗h4+ 38 ♗g3 ♖xg7 39 ♗xh4

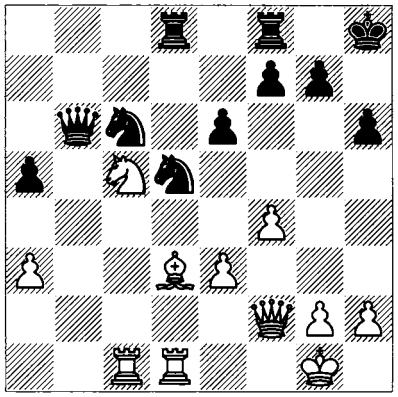
Material is equal, but White is lost.

39...♕c2 40 ♗d8+ ♘xd8 41 ♕b8+

After 41 ♕xd8+ ♔b7 there are no checks.

41...♘b7 0-1

A player who overestimates his attacking prospects often indulges in aggressive but unjustified pawn advances in the direction of the enemy king. In the likely event that his attack collapses, the advanced pawns will become weak and, if his king is on that side of the board, it may well become exposed to attack itself.



Vidmar – Marshall
New York 1927

White has a definite positional advantage. His pieces are more actively placed, since the c5-knight is established on a useful square in the enemy half of the board, and at the moment the f8-rook is out of play.

30 g4?!

30 ♖d2 is a natural continuation, intending ♖b2 and possibly ♖b7, and after 30...e5 31 ♗e4 ♘f6 32 ♖b2 ♕c7 33 ♗f3 ♖c8 34 ♘e4 White retains his advantage. Instead White decides to lurch forward with his kingside pawns in the hope of creating direct threats against Black's king, but this is unlikely to succeed in view of the fluid situation in the centre. Not only does the time wasted allow Black to improve his position, but the pawn advances seriously weaken White's kingside.

30...♘de7

Clearing the d-file ready for ...♖d5.

31 h4?!

It is White's whole plan which is wrong rather than the individual moves. He could still have backed out by 31 ♖d2, with a slight advantage.

31...♖d5! 32 e4 ♖d4

The rook is now well-placed to exploit the vulnerable pawns along White's fourth rank.

33 f5?!

With this move the advantage definitely passes over to Black. By playing 33 ♘d7! ♕d8 34 ♘xf8 ♖xd3 35 ♖xd3 ♕xd3 36 g5 hxg5 37 fxg5 ♘e5 38 g6 ♔g8 39 ♘h7 ♘f3+ 40 ♔h1 ♘xg6 41 ♘g5 ♘xg5 42 hxg5 ♕xe4+ 43 ♕g2 White reaches a position that is likely to result in a draw.

33...exf5 34 gxf5 ♘e5 35 ♗e2 ♖xd1+ 36 ♖xd1 ♖d8 37 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 38 f6 ♘7c6 39 fxg7+ ♔xg7

The only visible remnant of White's kingside pawn advance is the exposed h4-pawn. Since in addition White's bishop is inferior to the e5-knight, it is clear that White is now fighting for a draw.

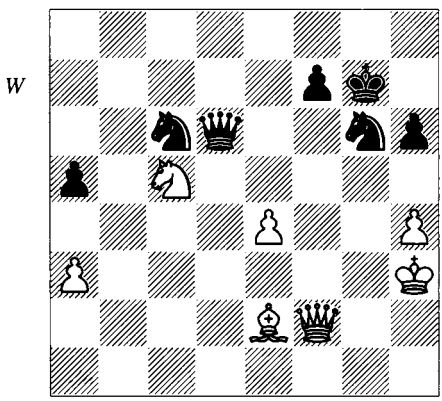
40 ♔g2?

The king is poorly placed here. 40 ♔f1! gives White fair drawing chances.

40...♘g6! 41 ♔h3

Now 41 h5 runs into 41...♕g5+.

41...♕d6!



The threat of 42...♘f4+ forces the white king back.

42 ♔g2

42 ♘d3 ♘d4 is also hopeless for White.

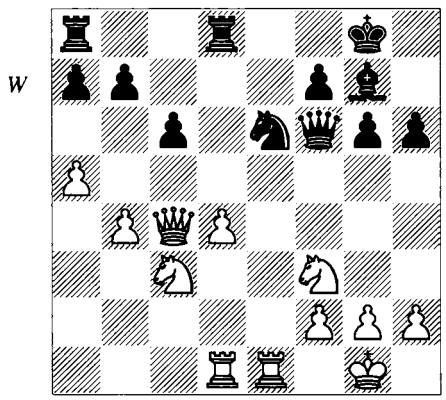
42...♘d4 43 ♘b7 ♕e5 44 ♔f1 ♘f4 45 ♕g3+ ♔h7 46 ♗d3 ♘de6 47 ♗a6 ♕a1+ 48 ♕e1 ♕b2 49 ♕e3 ♕g2+ 50 ♔e1 ♕c2 51 ♕f3 ♘g2+

Black can win a piece by 51...♕c1+ 52 ♔f2 ♕c6, but the method he chooses is also adequate.

52 ♔f1 ♘ef4 53 ♔g1 ♘xh4 54 ♕f1 ♕xe4 55 ♘c5 ♕e3+ 56 ♔h1 ♕xc5 57 ♗d3+ f5 0-1

93 Missing a Tactical Defence

One common mistake particularly affects players with an attacking disposition. Such players often see all kinds of imaginative tactical opportunities for themselves, but remain blind to even relatively simple tactics for their opponents. The result is that they may embark on an attack, often involving a sacrifice, only to discover too late that it is unsound due to a tactical resource. There are various reasons for this type of oversight. Many players see more ideas for themselves than for their opponents in general and not only in tactical situations. Other players love sacrificing and subconsciously they don't want to find a refutation of their attack, so they don't look very hard for one.



Stefansson – Carlsen
European Team Ch, Khersonissos 2007

Black's position is comfortable. White has an isolated d-pawn, which is under attack by four black pieces, but despite this Black cannot claim more than an edge. White's pieces are all developed in active positions, and by continuing 19 ♘e4 ♕f5 20 ♘c5 White can keep his disadvantage to a minimum. Instead, White decides to play for an attack.

19 ♘e5?!

With the serious threat of 20 a6 bxa6 (20...b5 21 ♕xc6 ♖ac8 22 ♘d5! also wins for White) 21 ♘e4 and White will win material since 21...♕f5 22 ♘xc6 followed by d5 is crushing.

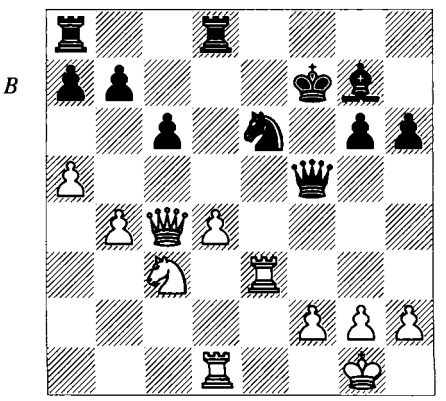
19...♕f5!

Practically the only move, but a good one. Now 20 a6 fails because after 20...b5! 21 ♕xc6? ♖ac8 White lacks the ♘d5 trick and so loses a piece. Moving the knight to e5 has also left White's pieces vulnerable, and indeed Black is immediately threatening 20...♘xd4!. This is where the psychological aspect is important: White adopted an aggressive but misguided plan, and although it might now be objectively best to play 20 ♘f3 and admit that the previous move was a mistake, it's very hard to play such a move. Instead White continues with his attack, since it's the only consistent follow-up to his previous move, and he probably didn't look too hard for a refutation.

20 ♘xf7? ♔xf7!

After 20...♕xf7?! 21 ♕xe6 ♖xd4 22 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 Black is only marginally better.

21 ♖e3



This is White's idea, threatening 22 ♖f3.

21...♗xd4!

An unexpected tactical blow refuting White's attack. Other moves are inferior: 21...♔e7?? 22 ♖de1 ♖d6 23 ♖f3 ♕g4 24 ♖e4 ♕h5 25 g4! ♕g5 26 h4 ♕xh4 27 ♘b5! cxb5 28 ♖xe6+ ♖xe6 29 ♕c7+ ♔e8 30 ♕f7+ ♔d8 31 ♕xe6 is winning for White, while 21...♗f6? allows 22 ♖f3, with a perpetual attack on the queen.

22 ♖f3 ♕xf3 23 gxf3 ♗xc3 24 ♖xd8 ♖xd8

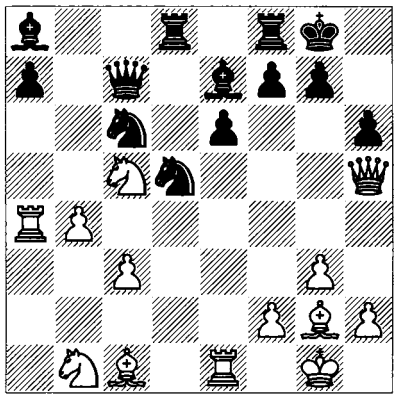
25 ♕xc3 loses the queen to 25...♖d1+ 26 ♔g2 ♘f4+ 27 ♔g3 ♘e2+, so Black keeps a decisive material advantage.

25 f4 ♖d4 0-1

Now 26 ♕xc3 is met by 26...♖d1+ 27 ♔g2 ♘xf4+ followed by ...♖d3+.

Tactical defences often depend on the attacker's weak back rank. The attacker frequently has to send a queen and rook in the direction of the enemy king in order to pursue his attack, and the effect is to leave the back rank poorly defended. Although it's not the case in the following example, many attacks involve playing a rook round to g3 or h3 and this makes it harder to give the king some air by playing a move such as h3.

W



Tiviakov – Le Quang
Moscow 2008

19 ♗xh6?

A tempting move, since for the moment Black's minor pieces are not well placed to defend the kingside, while White can switch his rook into the attack with b5 followed by ♖g4 or ♖h4. However, for the moment White's queen is the only attacking piece, so there must be some doubts about the soundness of the sacrifice. Objectively White should play a calm move such as 19 ♗d2, since the sacrifice isn't really correct, although it requires good defence to prove this.

19...♘f6

Bringing the knight back to the defence with gain of tempo. 19...gxh6? allows White at least to force a draw by 20 ♘xe6 fxe6 21 ♕g6+.

20 ♕h3

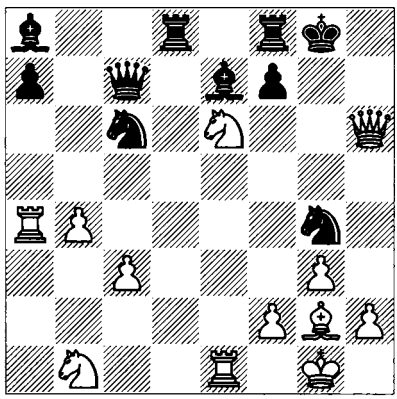
This is obviously the critical line, but it meets with a stunning refutation. The alternative is 20 ♕g5 ♘e8 21 ♕h5 gxh6 22 ♕xh6, but then 22...♘e5 23 ♘xe6 ♕b6! 24 ♖xe5 ♖d1+ 25 ♗f1 fxe6 26 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 27 ♖xe6 ♗f6 28 ♘a3 ♘c7! leaves Black with a large advantage despite White's four pawns for the piece. Black's pieces are ferociously active, while White is caught in an unbreakable pin along the first rank.

20...gxh6 21 ♕xh6

Threatening to win with 22 b5.

21...♘g4 22 ♘xe6

B



This is the position White was playing for and at first sight it appears very promising. White threatens mate on g7 and 22...fxe6? loses by force to 23 ♕g6+ ♔h8 24 ♕h5+ ♔g7 25 ♕xg4+ ♔h8 26 b5, while after 22...♘xh6? 23 ♘xc7 ♗b7 (otherwise the threats to a8 and c6 allow White to regain the piece in an even more advantageous fashion; for example, 23...♖d6 24 ♘xa8 ♖xa8 25 b5) 24 b5 ♖d7 25 bxc6 ♗xc6 26 ♗xc6 ♖xc7 27 ♗d5 White is a safe two pawns ahead in the ending.

22...♕e5!!

The stunning refutation of White's play. The mate on g7 is covered, and White is left with both rook and queen hanging.

23 ♕c1

23 ♖xe5 ♖d1+ 24 ♗f1 ♘xh6 wins for Black.

23...♕h8!

Precise play. 23...♕h5?! 24 h3 fxe6 25 hxg4 allows White to struggle on.

24 h3 fxe6 25 ♖xe6

Now 25 hxg4 may be met by 25...♘e5 26 ♗xa8 ♘xg4 followed by mate.

25...♖xf2

Black is not only two pieces up but also has a vicious attack.

26 ♖g6+

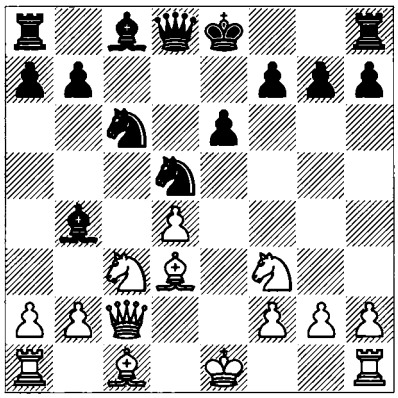
Or 26 hxg4 ♖xg2+ 27 ♔xg2 ♘e5+ and Black forces mate.

26...♔f7 27 ♖xg4 ♖xg2+ 28 ♔f1 ♔e8 0-1

94 Overvaluing a Material Advantage

Najdorf – Portisch
Varna Olympiad 1962

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 c5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e3 cxd4 7 exd4 ♗b4 8 ♕c2 ♘c6 9 ♗d3



9...♘xc3?

Black unwisely plays to win a pawn, even though he loses the right to castle in the process. This continuation seems to be curiously tempting, because despite Black's dismal score with it, every so often a player decides to try it again, generally with the same result. 9...♗a5 and 9...h6 are perfectly reasonable continuations.

10 bxc3 ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 ♕xd4 12 ♗b5+ ♔e7

12...♔f8 13 0-0 ♕xc3 is no better since 14 ♕a4 or 14 ♕d1 gives White a very strong attack.

13 0-0!

White is happy to offer a second pawn to fuel his growing initiative.

13...♕xc3 14 ♕e2

Now we can take stock of the position. Black is two pawns up, but his king is stuck in the centre and he is way behind in development; indeed, White is threatening to win at once by 15 ♗b2 or 15 ♗g5+ f6 16 ♖ac1. In order to meet these threats, Black will have to waste further time with his queen and dark-squared bishop. Nevertheless, there's no immediate win for White and that is the factor that seems to lead some players down this road; they see the extra material and no clear-cut win for the opponent and just grab the pawns. But compensation doesn't have to be short-term and here there are many factors indicating the extreme danger that Black is in. When considering the capture of material, it's important to think not only about any immediate refutation but also about the long-term consequences.

14...♗d6

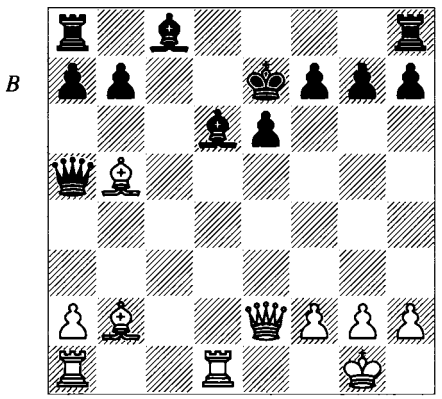
14...♕xa1 is the best practical chance, but after 15 ♗g5+ ♕f6 16 ♗xf6+ gxf6 17 ♖d1 a6 18 ♕c4 ♗d6 19 ♖xd6! ♔xd6 20 ♕d4+ ♔c7 21 ♕c3+ ♔b6 22 ♕xf6 ♖g8 23 ♕xf7 ♖d8 24 ♗a4 White has a large advantage. The h7-pawn will fall, and then White's two connected passed pawns on the kingside will give him a near-decisive advantage.

15 ♗b2 ♕a5

15...♕b4 16 ♖ab1 ♖d8 17 ♖fd1 is also very bad for Black.

16 ♖fd1

Threatening 17 ♖xd6 ♔xd6 18 ♕e5+ ♔e7 19 ♕c5+ ♔d8 20 ♕d6+, so the reply is forced.



16...♖d8 17 ♕h5 f6

17...h6 18 ♗xg7 ♗d7 19 ♕h4+ ♔e8 20 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7 (20...♖xd7 21 ♕xh6 is also winning for White) 21 ♗f6 leads to a decisive gain of material.

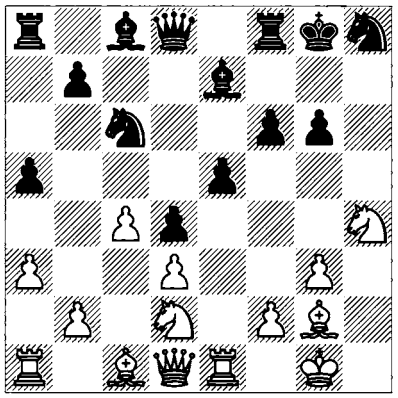
18 ♕xh7 ♔f7 19 ♗e2

The bishop switch to h5 is deadly.

19...♕g5

Defending g7 so as to meet 20 ♗h5+ with 20...♔e7 (although White still wins even then), but White's next move drives the queen away.

20 ♗c1 ♗xh2+ 21 ♔xh2 ♕e5+ 22 f4 1-0



Tomashevsky – Morozevich
Russian Ch, Moscow 2007

In this unclear position, White has some temporary pressure on the kingside, but Black has a central pawn-majority.

16 ♗e4 f5 17 ♗xc6?!

White plays to win a pawn, but he overvalues his material advantage and underestimates the extent of Black's positional compensation. 17 ♗d5+ ♔g7 18 ♘df3 leaves White with a satisfactory position.

17...bxc6 18 ♘hf3 ♘f7 19 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 20 ♖xe5 ♗d6 21 ♖e1 c5

Black has more space and two active bishops pointing at the enemy kingside. In return for this, White has an extra b-pawn which has little prospect of being useful in the near future. However, this isn't a clear-cut case like the preceding example. Despite the potential in Black's position, if White can exchange one of the menacing bishops he will have relieved much of the pressure. Nevertheless, from a practical point of view taking the pawn was not a good decision since Black is certainly not worse, and it's always easier to play when one has the initiative.

22 ♘f3 ♔g7?

Definitely wrong. Black should obstruct the development of White's bishop by 22...f4. Then 23 ♘e5 (23 ♕e2 ♕f6 is slightly better for Black) 23...fxg3 24 fxg3 ♕f6 25 ♗f4 ♖a7 is at least equal for Black.

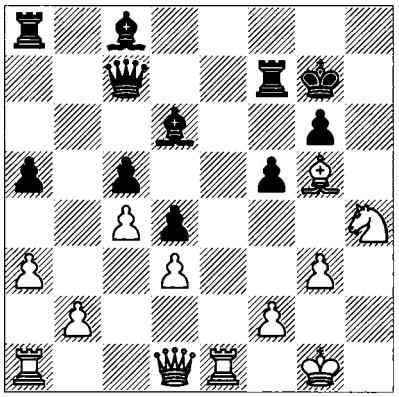
23 ♗g5?

White reciprocates. 23 ♗f4! is correct, playing for exchanges. After 23...♗xf4 24 gxf4 there's no convenient way to attack the f4-pawn, while White has the e5-square for his rook and the g5-square for his knight.

23...♕c7

Now it's impossible to arrange ♗f4 since 24 ♕d2 may be met by 24...♖h8 and Black is already threatening to win by 25...♗b7.

24 ♘h4 ♖f7



25 ♕e2

It's starting to become awkward for White. 25 ♘g2 is tempting, but after 25...♗b7 26 ♘f4 ♖h8 27 f3 ♕c8 followed by ...♕a8 Black has good play for the pawn.

25...♗d7

Not 25...♗b7?? due to 26 ♕e6, but Black is not in a rush. Now he intends ...♖h8-h5.

26 f4

This reinforces the g5-bishop but removes any possibility for active play by White and further weakens the long diagonal.

26...♖h8 27 ♔f2 ♕b7 28 ♖ab1 ♖h5?

Threatening to sacrifice on g5, but carelessly allowing White to make a break for freedom on the queenside. 28...a4 is correct.

29 ♘f3?

After 29 b4! cxb4 30 c5! ♗c7 31 axb4 axb4 32 ♕b2 ♕d5 33 ♘f3 White is even slightly better.

29...♗c6

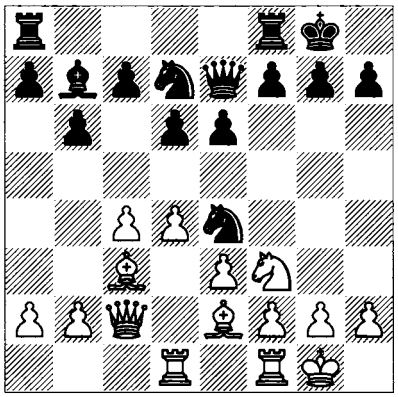
White has missed his last chance.

30 ♖g1 ♖f8 31 ♘h4 ♖xg5! 32 fxg5 f4 33 g4 ♖e8 34 ♕d2 ♖e3

There's no longer any defence.

35 b4 ♕e7 36 bxc5 ♕xg5 37 ♖h1 ♗xh1 38 ♖xh1 ♗xc5 39 ♕d1 ♕e7 40 a4 ♖g3 41 ♘g2 ♗b4 42 ♖h2 ♕e5 43 c5 f3 44 ♘h4 ♕f4 0-1

95 Overvaluing the Two Bishops



Vidmar – Nimzowitsch
New York 1927

White's passive opening has resulted in a roughly equal position. White, it is true, has the two bishops, but with few open lines they are not especially active. Black, on the other hand, has easy development and control of e4. Bishops have less power when there are many pawns on the board, but as pawns are exchanged their power grows. The problem for White here is that there aren't many pawn exchanges in prospect.

12 ♗e1

White decides to keep the bishops, but at the cost of blocking in the rook on f1.

12...f5 13 ♕b3 c5 14 ♘d2 ♘xd2 15 ♖xd2 e5 16 dxe5 dxe5 17 f3

White opens a line for the e1-bishop, so as to meet 17...♘f6 by 18 ♗h4. Black reacts promptly to nullify White's idea.

17...g5! 18 ♗f2?!

White loses this game because he cannot bear to part with his bishops, but keeping them away from possible exchanges means that they are doing little themselves. Here 18 ♗g3 is better, with approximate equality after 18...f4! 19 ♗f2 e4 20 exf4 gxf4 21 fxe4 ♘e5, since Black has enough play for the pawn.

18...♘f6 19 ♖fd1 ♖ae8

An instructive move, because it appears more natural to challenge White on the d-file. However, White's doubled rooks are not especially effective since playing ♖d6 achieves little. Instead Black concentrates on his own play, keeping White guessing about which pawn he will push on the kingside.

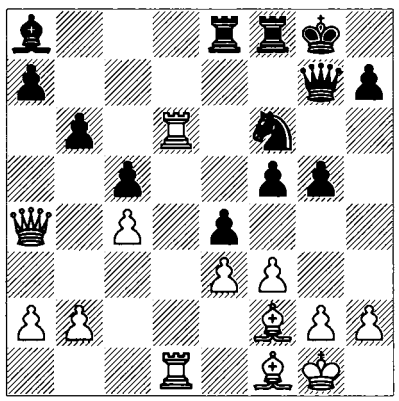
20 ♕a4 ♗a8 21 ♖d6 ♕g7

It's important not to allow White to activate his bishops. Thus 21...e4? is wrong because 22 f4 gxf4 23 ♗h4! leaves Black in trouble. The move played prepares ...g4, which will open up the long diagonal for the a8-bishop.

22 ♗f1?

The point of this move is to meet 22...g4?! by 23 ♗h4, when 23...gxf3? no longer threatens mate, but it's hopelessly passive. White should have been prepared to surrender a bishop by 22 ♗e1 g4 23 fxg4 ♘xg4 24 ♗xg4 ♕xg4 25 ♕c2, when Black has only an edge.

22...e4



23 ♗e1?!

After this White is lost. The best chance was to give up a pawn by 23 fxe4 (23 f4 gxf4 24 ♗h4 no longer works due to 24...♘g4) 23...♘xe4 24 ♖d7 ♕xb2 25 ♗e1, since White at least gets his rook into an active position. However, Black remains clearly better after 25...f4 26 exf4 ♕f6.

23...exf3 24 ♗c3

At last one of the bishops gains some activity, but at a very high price since White has lost a pawn and his kingside has been damaged.

24...♕e7 25 ♖6d3

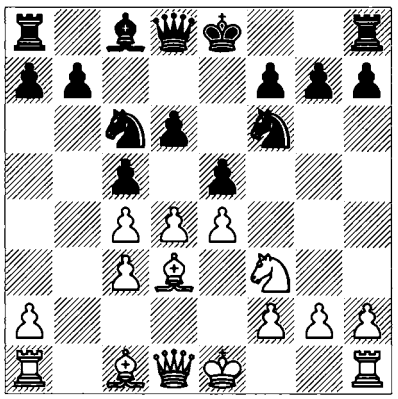
25 ♗xf6 is met by 25...♕xe3+ 26 ♔h1 fxg2+ 27 ♗xg2 ♕e1+ 28 ♖xe1 ♖xe1#.

25...fxg2 26 ♗xg2 ♗xg2 27 ♗xf6 ♕e4 28 ♖1d2 ♗h3 29 ♗c3 ♕g4+ 0-1

It's mate in two more moves.

Portisch – Browne
Tilburg 1982

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♗d3 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 ♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 d6 8 e4 e5



This line, the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo-Indian, caused particular problems for advocates of the two bishops, and Portisch lost not only this game but also two others, to Timman and Seirawan, all in the same year. Later Portisch changed the line he employed against the Nimzo and enjoyed much greater success.

9 h3 h6 10 ♗e3 b6

Black's plan is simply to put all his pawns on dark squares, erecting a solid pawn-chain which allows the white bishops little scope.

11 d5 ♘e7

According to the classical view, White, with his two bishops and space advantage, should stand well, and by gradually advancing pawns will restrict the knights more and more. Practice has shown that this view is simplistic. It's hard for White to follow this strategy while also containing Black's counterplay by ...f5 or ...b5.

12 ♘d2 ♘g6 13 g3

Keeping the knight out of f4, but the attack on h3 means that White cannot castle.

13...0-0 14 ♔f1

The king heads to g2, but this gives Black time to set his counterplay in motion.

14...♘e8 15 ♔g2 ♘e7

It's important that the knight can recapture on f5 since the immediate 15...f5 16 exf5 ♗xf5 17 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 18 ♕g4 favours White.

16 f3 f5

Threatening ...f4, so White must take.

17 exf5 ♗xf5 18 ♘e4?!

White wants to keep the bishop-pair, but he should play for equality with 18 ♗xf5 ♘xf5 19 ♗f2 followed by ♕e2.

18...♘f6 19 a4

White rules out ...b5.

19...a5

A typical idea in this line. Meeting a4 with ...a5 removes any danger of White playing a5, and leaves the a4-pawn subject to attack (for example, by ...♗d7 and ...♕e8). True, the b6-pawn is backward, but if attacked can easily be covered by ...♘c8.

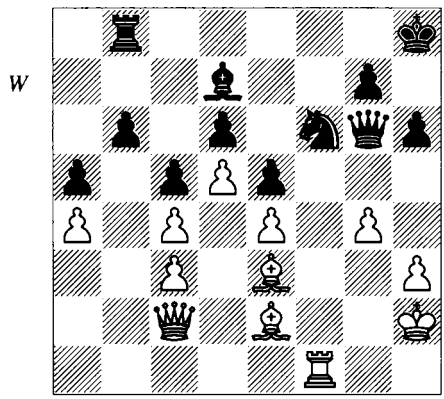
20 ♖b1 ♖b8 21 ♕c2 ♘xe4 22 fxe4?!

White aims to keep both his bishops, but now Black starts to gain the upper hand. After 22 ♗xe4 Black only has an edge.

22...♗d7 23 ♖a1 ♕e8 24 ♗e2 ♕g6 25 ♔h2 ♔h8!

Planning ...♘g8-f6 to step up the pressure on e4.

26 ♖hf1 ♘g8 27 g4 ♖xf1 28 ♖xf1 ♘f6



29 ♗f3 ♖f8 30 ♕b3?

This allows Black to launch a decisive attack. 30 ♕d1 is probably best, but White's position is uncomfortable after 30...♔g8 planning ...♕e8.

30...♘xg4+! 31 hxg4 ♗xg4 32 ♗g2

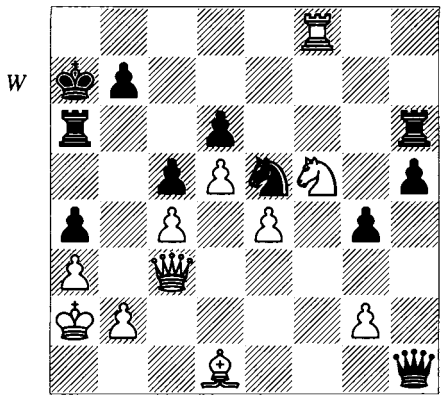
32 ♗xg4 ♖xf1 33 ♗e2 ♖e1! 34 ♕c2 ♕f6 leaves White totally tied up.

32...♖xf1 33 ♗xf1 ♕xe4 34 ♗f2 ♕f4+ 35 ♔g1 ♕c1 36 ♔g2 e4 37 ♕a2 ♗f3+ 0-1

The finish would be 38 ♔g1 ♕g5+ 39 ♔h2 ♕h5+ 40 ♗h3 ♗g4.

96 Automatically Accepting Sacrifices

When faced with an unforeseen sacrifice that is not obviously decisive, one's immediate reaction is to accept it. There's even a chess saying that "the only way to refute a sacrifice is to accept it". But, like most of these sayings, there are many exceptions, and it's essential to consider whether there are realistic alternatives before grabbing the offered material.



Galliamova – Morozevich
Russia Cup, Novgorod 1997

White now struck with an unexpected sacrifice:

37 ♗xa4!

The best move since after 37 ♘xh6 ♕xd1 38 ♘f5 ♕e2 39 ♘xd6 ♖xd6 40 ♕xe5 ♕xc4+ Black easily reaches a draw, while 37 ♘e7 ♕xd1 38 ♘c8+ only leads to perpetual check.

37...♖xa4?

Taking the bishop is a fatal mistake since White gains a decisive attack by an admittedly not very obvious continuation. Black should have considered if there were any other possibilities. If declining the sacrifice is clearly catastrophic, then one may as well accept and hope for the best, but surprisingly often it turns out that there are other possibilities which, while perhaps not favourable, are at least not disastrous. This applies especially in cases where the attacker has already made a sacrifice (as in this example, where Black is currently the exchange ahead). When the defender is already material up he may well remain so even if he declines the sacrifice. Then the tempo may be better spent on defence or counter-attack rather than grabbing additional material.

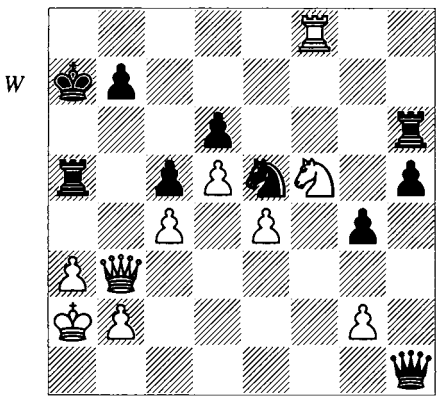
In this case Black had a saving line in 37...♕f1! 38 ♗b5 (the only move to offer winning chances since 38 ♕b3?! ♖h7 is at least equal for Black) 38...♘d3 39 ♘xh6 ♕d1 40 ♗xa6 ♘c1+ 41 ♕xc1 ♕xc1 42 ♘f5 ♔xa6 43 ♘xd6 ♕h6 and Black should be able to draw since he can create a passed h-pawn rather quickly.

38 ♕b3!

White plays for the attack and ignores the rook on h6. After 38 ♘xh6? ♕xg2 39 ♕b3 ♖a6 40 ♘f5 ♖b6 41 ♕a4+ ♖a6 Black forces a draw.

38...♖a5

There is nothing better because 38...♖xc4 and 38...♖a6 also lose to 39 ♘e7.



39 ♘e7!

Once again White spurns the rook, since 39 ♘xh6? ♕c1! 40 ♘f5 ♘xc4 41 ♘e7 ♖xa3+! 42 bxa3 ♕d2+ only leads to a draw.

39...b5

There is no defence since 39...♘d7 loses to 40 ♘c6+! bxc6 41 ♖f7 ♖b5 42 cxb5 with a decisive attack.

40 cxb5 ♕e1

40...♔b6 41 ♖b8+ ♔c7 42 ♘c6! also wins for White.

41 ♘c6+ ♘xc6 42 b6+ ♔b7

Or 42...♔a6 43 ♖a8+ ♔b7 44 dxc6+ ♔xa8 45 ♕g8#.

43 dxc6+ ♔xc6 44 ♖c8+ 1-0

It's mate in two more moves.

Plenca – Prohaszka

European Under-18 Team Ch, Subotica 2007

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 ♘f3 ♗e7 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 ♗d3 ♘c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 ♗f6 11 ♗e4 ♘de7?!

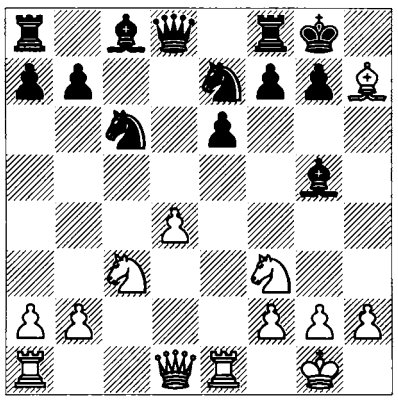
An unusual and rather passive alternative to the usual 11...♘ce7. However, in this game it provokes White into making a speculative sacrifice.

12 ♗g5?!

The best move is 12 ♗e3!, which simply defends the d-pawn. Then 12...b6? is bad due to 13 ♘g5 g6 14 ♕f3, so Black would have to be content with 12...♗d7 13 ♕d3 g6 14 a3, but here White is better as Black's pieces are relatively inactive.

12...♗xg5 13 ♗xh7+

The modest 13 ♘xg5 ♘f5 14 ♗xf5 ♕xg5 15 ♗e4 ♖d8 is fine for Black.



At first sight the sacrifice looks very dangerous. For example, 13...♔xh7? 14 ♘xg5+ ♔g6 (14...♔g8? 15 ♕h5 ♖e8 16 ♕xf7+ ♔h8 17 ♖e4 leads to mate, while 14...♔h6 15 ♕g4 f5 16 ♕h4+ ♔g6 17 ♖xe6+! ♗xe6 18 ♘xe6 ♕d6 19 ♖e1 ♔f7 20 ♘g5+ ♔e8 21 d5 gives White a huge attack) 15 ♕g4 f5 16 ♕g3 ♔f6 17 ♘b5 ♘d5 18 ♘d6 g6 19 ♘xc8 f4 20 ♕g4 ♕xc8 21 ♖xe6+ ♔g7 22 ♖ae1 is very good for White, since he has two pawns and a massive attack for the piece. However, it's important to remember that sacrifices don't have to be accepted. It's especially easy to forget this with standard sacrifices such as ♗xh7+, since in the vast majority of cases there's no choice but to take the bishop.

13...♔h8! 14 ♘xg5 g6

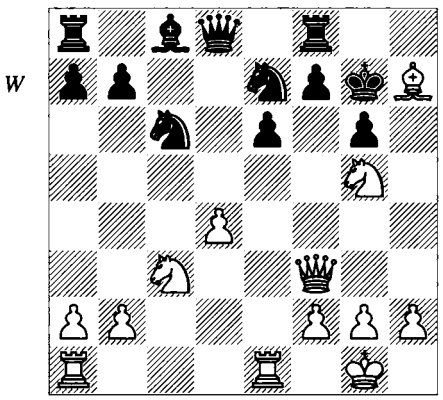
Now Black is a pawn down, but he has imprisoned the bishop on h7. His immediate threats are 15...♕xd4 and 15...♔g7 followed by ...♖h8, so White must play energetically to follow up his earlier aggressive play.

15 ♕f3

The immediate bishop sacrifice 15 ♗xg6 fxg6 16 ♕g4 is roughly level. After 16...♔g7 17 ♖xe6 ♖f6 18 ♖ae1 ♗xe6 19 ♘xe6+ ♖xe6 20 ♖xe6 ♘xd4 21 ♖xe7+ ♕xe7 22 ♕xd4+ ♕f6 a draw is likely.

15...♔g7

Black must take care; e.g., 15...♕xd4?? loses to 16 ♕h3 ♔g7 17 ♗g8!! ♘xg8 18 ♕h7+ ♔f6 19 ♘ge4+ ♔e7 20 ♖ad1 ♕e5 21 ♕h4+ f6 22 ♕h7+ ♖f7 23 ♕xg8 with a decisive attack.



16 ♕h3?!

Threatening to win by 17 ♗g8 or 17 ♗xg6, but these threats are easily met. The best line is 16 ♖ad1 f6 17 ♘xe6+ ♗xe6 18 ♖xe6 ♔xh7 19 ♖xf6 ♔g7 20 ♖xf8 ♕xf8, when the attack has gone but White has three pawns for the piece and can count on approximate equality.

16...♖h8

Threatening 17...e5.

17 ♘ce4 ♘f5

Now the threat is 18...f6. It's obvious that White is struggling to stay afloat.

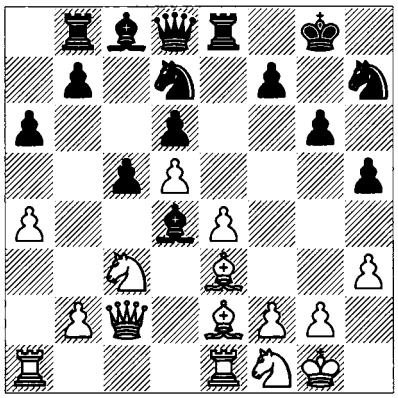
18 g4 ♘d6 19 d5?

19 ♘xd6 ♕xg5 20 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 21 ♗xg6+ was the last chance, although Black retains a large advantage after 21...♔g7 22 ♗h5 ♗d7.

19...♘xe4 20 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 21 ♕h6 ♕g5 22 ♗xg6+ ♕xg6 23 ♕xh8 ♕xg4+ 0-1

97 Lack of Alertness

W



Grachev – A. Kovačević
European Ch, Rijeka 2010

This position, which arose from a Modern Benoni, is favourable for White. His pieces are well coordinated, while Black hasn't managed to generate any concrete counterplay.

19 ♖ad1?

A subtle slip. 19 ♖ed1! ♕f6 20 ♕d3 is correct, because after 20...♘e5? 21 ♗xd4 ♘xd3 22 ♗xf6 White wins a pawn as there is no attacked rook on e1.

19...♕f6 20 ♕d3 ♗e5?

When a game starts to go wrong, the progression downwards to defeat is not inevitable. It often happens that for some reason, such as an inaccuracy by the opponent, there will be a moment when it is possible to arrest the decline and save the game. This moment is often fleeting and the opportunity may be there one move and gone the next. It's necessary to stay alert in order to seize any chance to redirect the course of the game. Many players miss such chances because they believe that the strategic flow is going against them, and fail to spot a momentary tactical chance to reverse the trend. In this example Black, thanks to White's inaccurate 19th move, had one chance to secure some activity and he overlooked it. The correct line is 20...♘e5! 21 ♕d2 (with the rook still on e1, the line 21 ♗xd4 ♘xd3 22 ♗xf6 ♘xe1 favours Black) 21...♗xh3! (this is the key idea, exploiting the slight weakness of White's kingside) 22 ♗xd4 (22 gxh3 ♘g5 gives Black a very dangerous attack) 22...cxd4 23 ♕xd4 ♕g5, when Black has sufficient counterplay since White's kingside has been weakened and he will find it very hard to force through f4.

21 ♕d2

The chance has gone and the game moves inexorably in White's favour.

21...b5?

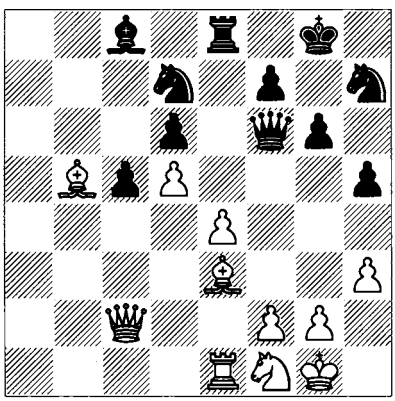
This desperate attempt to secure active play rebounds on Black. He should try 21...♗xc3 22 bxc3 ♖xe4; although it's risky to part with the dark-squared bishop, at least Black gets a pawn in compensation.

22 axb5 axb5 23 ♘xb5 ♗xb2 24 ♖b1 ♖xb5

Since 24...♗e5 25 f4 is catastrophic, this is the only way to avoid losing material. However, now Black's dark-squared bishop disappears without any material as compensation.

25 ♗xb5 ♗c3 26 ♕c2 ♗xe1 27 ♖xe1

B



White is winning since his two bishops are very powerful, while Black suffers from a weak d6-pawn and bad piece coordination.

27...♕d8 28 ♗f4 ♕f6 29 ♗h2

There's nothing much Black can do about ♘d2-c4, when d6 collapses.

29...♖e7 30 ♘d2 ♘b6

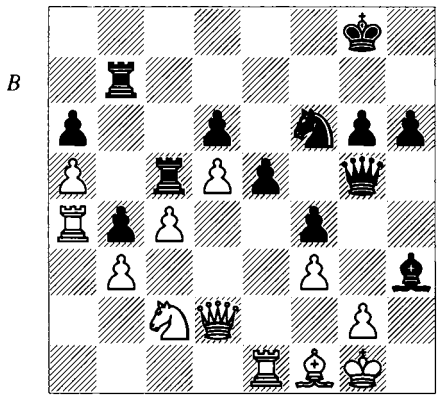
Attempting to prevent ♘c4, but allowing a central breakthrough.

31 e5 ♗f5 32 ♘e4 ♗xe4?

White is also winning after 32...♕g5 33 ♘xg5 ♗xc2 34 ♘xh7 ♔xh7 35 ♖c1 followed by exd6.

33 exf6 1-0

Failure to seize momentary opportunities can have multiple causes. Making false assumptions may render it harder to spot unusual tactical opportunities, and time-trouble can compound the problem.



Anand – Shirov
Wijk aan Zee 2010

This complex position is hard to assess. At the moment Black is a pawn up, but the b4-pawn is about to fall, after which White will have a 4 to 2 queenside pawn-majority, which can easily advance to create a passed pawn. Black obviously has some counterplay on the kingside, but at the moment his rooks are badly placed to aid this counterplay. The basic point is that the long-term chances lie with White and his queenside pawns, so Black must do everything he can to generate threats on the kingside. If Black continues correctly, he will be at least equal.

35...e4!

More accurate than 35...♖e7 36 ♗d3, which only reduces the impact of ...e4 since now White can take on e4 with his bishop.

36 fxe4 ♖e7 37 ♘d4

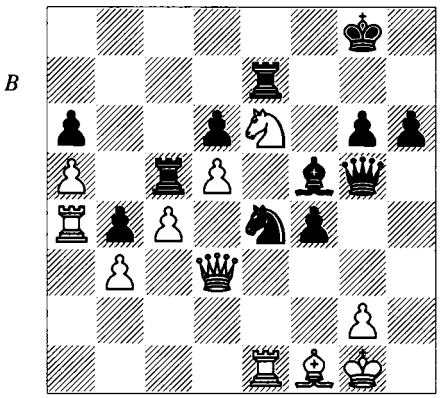
Now 37 ♗d3?? loses to 37...♕g3 followed by ...♘g4, so White brings his knight towards the kingside and controls the important f3-square. Additionally, the knight can sometimes jump into e6.

37...♘xe4 38 ♕d3?

Drastic measures should be taken to curtail Black's growing initiative. By playing 38 ♖xe4! ♖xe4 39 ♖xb4 ♖c8 40 ♘f3 ♕g3 41 ♕f2 White nullifies Black's attack, when his play with the queenside pawns should compensate for his slight material disadvantage.

38...♗f5 39 ♘e6?!

This allows Black a forced win, but even the best line, 39 ♖xb4 ♖c8 40 ♘c6 ♖ee8, gives Black a very dangerous initiative.



39...♖xe6??

Missing a win and instead playing a losing move. How can a grandmaster with Shirov's strong tactical vision make a mistake like this? Time shortage played a role here, but there were other factors involved. Black's queen is attacked, and it's natural to assume that the queen has to move or the attacking piece has to be captured. Limiting your vision by making unwarranted assumptions can easily result in a tactical chance being overlooked. Once you realize that after 39...♘g3! Black's queen is invulnerable due to 40 ♘xg5 ♖xe1! 41 ♔f2 ♖xf1+ 42 ♕xf1 ♘xf1, it is immediately obvious that this is the best move. White's queen is now itself attacked, and in addition Black threatens ...♕h4 with a deadly attack against White's king. There's no defence; for example, Black wins after both 40 ♕d2 ♕h4 41 ♘xf4 ♖xe1 42 ♕xe1 ♖c7 and 40 ♕d4 ♗xe6 41 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 42 dxe6 ♕h5 43 ♕xf4 ♕h1+ 44 ♔f2 ♖f5.

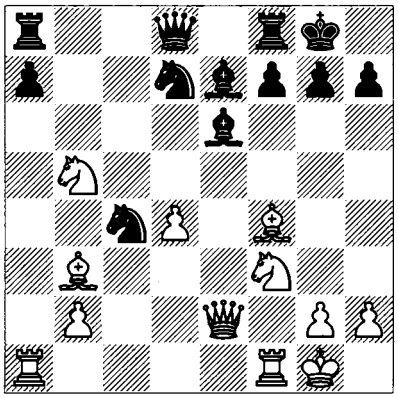
40 dxe6 ♖e5 41 ♖xb4 ♕d8

White's attack strikes first after 41...♘g3 42 ♕xd6.

42 ♕d4 f3 43 gxf3 ♘g5 44 ♖xe5 ♘xf3+ 45 ♔f2 ♘xe5 46 ♖b6 ♗xe6 47 ♗e2 ♕f6+ 48 ♔e3 ♕g5+ 49 ♕f4 ♕g1+ 50 ♔d2 ♕a1 51 ♖xd6 ♕xa5+ 52 ♔d1 g5 53 ♕d4 ♔f7 54 ♖d5 ♗xd5 55 ♕xe5 1-0

98 Allowing a Swindle

B



Hebden – Nunn
London (Evening Standard) 1979

Everything has gone wrong for Black in the opening and he now faces the twin threats of ♗xc4 and ♘c7. White is undoubtedly winning, and to notch up the full point he need only bear in mind the advice to keep it simple.

15...♘db6 16 ♘c7 ♕d7

A key moment, as White has several tempting options. It's not bad to play 17 ♘xa8 ♖xa8 18 ♖ac1 ♖c8 19 ♖fd1 and the extra material must count in the end. However, simplest of all is 17 ♘xe6! fxe6 (after 17...♕xe6 18 ♘e5 ♖ac8 19 ♖a6 the pins will cost Black a piece) 18 ♗g3 ♖ac8 19 ♖ac1 ♕d5 20 ♖c2 ♖c6 21 ♖fc1 ♖fc8, when White can win a piece by, for example, 22 ♔h1 followed by 23 ♘d2. The key point about this line is that Black's moves are forced; although White delays winning material for several moves, Black is paralysed by the pins and will inevitably collapse at some point. This is a good example of keeping it simple; little calculation is necessary and Black has no counterplay.

17 ♖fc1?!

This move should also win, but it's more complicated than the other options.

17...♖ac8 18 ♖xa7

Threatening 19 ♘xe6 ♕xa7 20 ♘xf8.

18...♗d6 19 ♗xd6 ♘xd6 20 ♗xe6 fxe6 21 ♖c5

Moving the rook to a square where it is defended sets up a new threat of 22 ♕xe6+.

21...♔h8

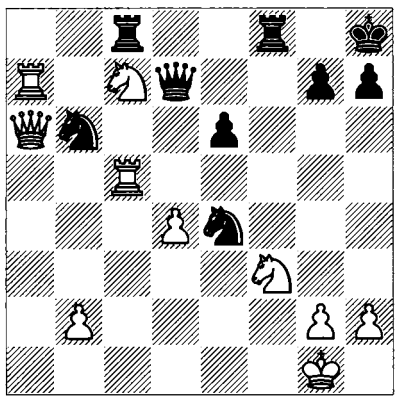
White is still winning, but it is no longer as simple as it was at move 17. Winning positions are rarely thrown away by a single move; more often, there is a gradual decline from an easily winning position to a position which is winning with difficulty and then to a position that isn't winning at all. This emphasizes the importance of looking for a simple, efficient win early on.

22 ♕a6?

Attacking b6 and defending the a7-rook, but moving an important piece away from the kingside. White should play either the simple 22 b4 or the more complicated 22 ♕xe6 ♖xc7 23 ♕xd7 ♖xd7 24 ♖xd7 ♘xd7 25 ♖d5 ♖f6 26 ♘e5 ♘xe5 27 dxe5 ♖f5 28 ♖xd6 ♔g8 29 e6, liquidating to a winning rook and pawn ending.

22...♘e4

W



Black's first active move of the game forces White to play accurately.

23 ♕xb6?

Now White has no advantage. 23 ♖c2! ♖xf3 24 gxf3 ♕xd4+ 25 ♔g2 ♘f6 26 ♖e2! would still have been good for White.

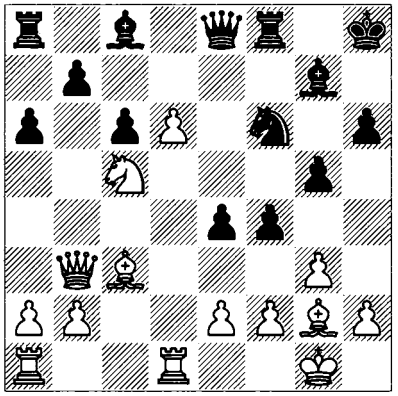
23...♖xf3!

An unwelcome blow since 24 gxf3? ♕xd4+ leads to mate. It's amazing how often a player who lets an easy win slip to a draw ends up by losing. White could still have saved the game by 24 ♘xe6 ♘xc5 25 gxf3 ♕xe6 26 dxc5 ♕e1+ 27 ♔g2 ♕e2+, with perpetual check.

24 ♖c1? ♖b3! 25 ♕xb3 ♕xd4+ 26 ♔h1 ♘f2+ 0-1

With smothered mate to come.

B



Giri – Aronian
Amber Rapid, Monaco 2011

Black is lost here as there is no real defence to the threat of 20 ♗xf6 followed by 21 d7. Aronian does his best to stir up some confusion.

19...e3 20 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 21 d7 exf2+ 22 ♔f1 ♗xd7 23 ♘xd7 ♖e6

White is a piece up in return for two pawns, but Black's compensation for his material disadvantage is barely visible since White's king is relatively safe and he need only worry about the immediate threat of 24...♖xe2. In the following play White made two mistakes: assuming that any move wins and playing unnecessarily forcing moves instead of simply consolidating his position.

24 ♘b6?

Already a significant error, moving the knight to the queenside and away from the area where all the action is taking place. 24 ♖d2 ♖e7 25 ♖ad1 is simple and strong since White defends e2, doubles rooks and maintains his knight on the active square d7. Then 25...♕h5 (25...♖d8 loses to 26 ♘f6) 26 h3 fxg3 27 ♕xg3 leaves Black with nothing to show for the piece.

24...♖e3?!

24...♖b8 is slightly more accurate, because White must still spend a tempo defending e2.

25 ♕c4

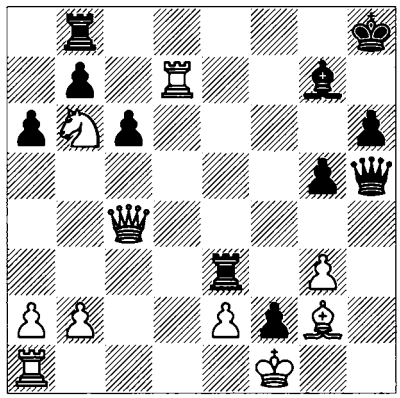
25 ♕c2! is a little better as it defends b2 as well as e2, and leaves c4 clear for the knight to return to the game. After 25...♖b8 26 g4 h5 27 ♘c4 ♖e6 28 ♗f3 White again stands to win.

25...♖b8 26 ♖d7?

Throwing away all White's advantage. It's not necessary to enter a complicated line when the simple 26 g4 h5 27 ♗f3 is effective. Here we see the typical error of overcomplicating in a winning position when solid, safe moves are more appropriate.

26...fxg3 27 hxg3 ♕h5!

W



Black takes his chance to play actively and now even threatens to win by 28...♕h2 29 ♔xf2 ♖be8.

28 ♔xf2

28 ♖f7 ♖d8 29 ♖xf2 ♖xg3 is unclear.

28...♖be8 29 ♖e1 ♕h2 30 ♕g4 ♖3e6

Black can also play for a win by 30...♖xg3 31 ♕xg3 ♖f8+ 32 ♕f3 g4 33 ♕xf8+ ♗xf8 34 e3 ♕e5 when, despite White's slight material advantage, the exposed white king and dangerous black kingside pawns mean that White is the one trying to save the game.

31 ♖d3??

Once again we see the player who has thrown away the win also throwing away the draw, which he could still have reached by 31 ♖f7! h5 32 ♕f5 ♔g8 33 ♘d7, when Black has nothing better than 33...♖xe2+ 34 ♖xe2 ♖xe2+ 35 ♔xe2 ♕xg2+ 36 ♔d3 ♕xg3+ 37 ♕f3 ♕d6+ 38 ♔c2 ♕e6 39 ♖f5 ♕xd7 40 ♖xg5 and White is not in danger.

31...h5!

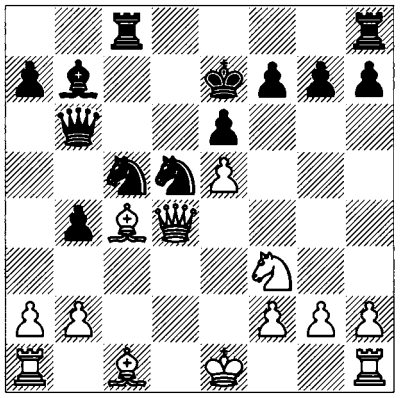
Decisive, since 32 ♕c4, for example, loses to 32...h4 33 gxh4 ♖e4 and Black has a decisive attack.

32 ♕xg5 ♖f6+ 33 ♖f3 ♖xf3+ 34 ♔xf3

34 exf3 ♗d4+ wins for Black.

34...♖f8+ 35 ♔e3 ♕xg2 36 ♔d3 ♕f2 37 ♖h1 ♕d4+ 38 ♔c2 ♕xb2+ 39 ♔d1 ♕b1+ 40 ♔d2 ♕xh1 0-1

99 Losing the Thread



Ljubojević – Nakamura
Amsterdam 2010

17 ♗g5+ ♔e8

This awkward move, blocking in the h8-rook, is forced as 17...f6 18 exf6+ gxf6 19 ♗xd5 exd5 20 0-0! fxg5 21 ♖fe1+ ♔f7 22 ♘xg5+ ♔g6 23 ♕g4 gives White an enormous attack for the piece.

18 0-0 ♘e7

Up to here, things have gone in White's favour. Black can't castle and White only needs to bring his remaining pieces into play to cause real problems for Black. However, White now starts to lose the thread of the game. Typical symptoms of this are planlessness, playing from move to move without any overall strategy, and spending too much time on moves. The result is often a series of small (or not so small) inaccuracies which result in a position going steadily downhill. The only cure is to focus on the most important factors in the position. If it's not possible to achieve everything you want in the position, it's essential to prioritize. Here White should focus on the key factor: preventing the weakening of his pawn-structure by ...♗xf3, which would double the g-pawns and give Black's knight a really secure square on f5. Two reasonable plans would be 19 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 20 ♕h4+ ♔f8 21 ♗e2, covering f3 and preparing to bring the rooks to c1 and d1, or best of all 19 ♕d1! h6 (19...♘f5 20 ♘d4 ♘xd4 21 ♕xd4 is also awkward) 20 ♗e3 ♘f5 21 ♘d4!, when 21...♘xe3 22 fxe3 opens the f-file and strengthens White's attack.

19 ♖fd1?

This looks good on general principles, but fails to deal with the main issues in the position.

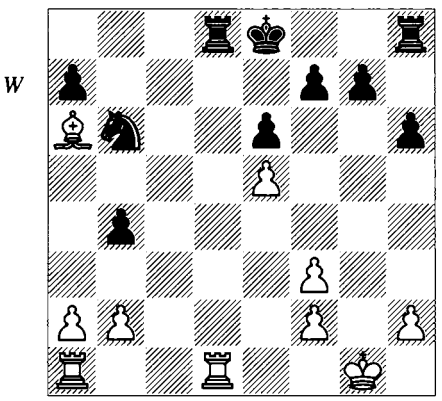
19...♗xf3 20 gxf3 h6 21 ♗e3 ♘f5 22 ♕d2 ♘xe3 23 ♕xe3

The exchanges have reduced White's attacking chances, and Black's king can occupy e7.

23...♘d7 24 ♕xb6?!

Now the key factor is the centralized black king, which is fine in an ending but a handicap in a middlegame. Therefore White should avoid the exchange of queens by 24 ♖d4 ♔e7 25 ♖ad1 ♖hd8 26 ♕f4, when he still has an edge.

24...♘xb6 25 ♗a6 ♖d8



26 ♖ac1

26 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 27 ♖c1 ♖e8 followed by ...♖e7 is also safe for Black.

26...♖xd1+ 27 ♖xd1 ♔e7 28 ♖d4 ♘d5 29 ♗b7 a5 30 ♗xd5?

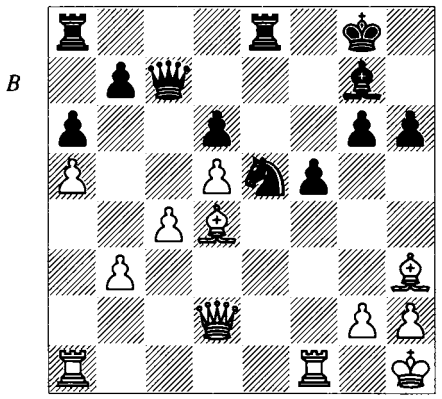
When things are going downhill it's easy to make further mistakes. 30 f4 is better.

30...♖d8!

Now White is worse due to his broken kingside pawns. He soon lost a pawn and the game:

31 ♖c4 ♖xd5 32 ♖c7+ ♔e8 33 f4 g5 34 fxg5 hxg5 35 a3 bxa3 36 bxa3 ♖xe5 37 ♔g2 ♖d5 38 h3 ♔f8 39 ♖c4 ♔e7 40 h4 gxh4 41 ♖xh4 ♔d6 42 ♔f1 ♔c5 43 ♔e2 ♖d4 44 ♖h7 ♖e4+ 45 ♔d3 ♖f4 46 ♔e3 e5 47 ♖h8 ♔b5 48 ♖c8 f6 49 ♖c3 ♖c4 50 ♖b3+ ♔c5 51 ♔d2 ♖d4+ 52 ♔e2 f5 53 ♖b8 ♖a4 54 ♖c8+ ♔d5 55 ♖c3 ♖e4+ 56 ♔d2 ♖c4 57 ♖h3? ♖f4 58 ♔e2 ♔c4 59 ♖g3 a4 60 f3 ♔b3 61 ♖g8 ♔xa3 62 ♔e3 ♖b4 63 ♖e8 e4 0-1

Sometimes both players lose the thread and fail to identify the key feature of the position. This can result in a whole series of errors.



Azarov – Movsesian
Dresden Olympiad 2008

This typical Sicilian position is roughly equal. White has the two bishops and more space, but the h3-bishop is out of play. Black would like to exchange dark-squared bishops, which would leave him with the better minor piece, but the immediate 26...♘f7 allows 27 g4, seizing the initiative. By pushing the h-pawn, Black clamps down on g4 and makes it harder for White to activate his h3-bishop.

26...h5! 27 ♖ac1

White must defend c4 before he can play b4 and c5.

27...♘f7 28 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 29 b4

The best move, making progress on the queenside as quickly as possible.

29...♖e4

There's not much Black can do to prevent c5, so he spends the tempo preparing to double rooks and thereby seize control of the open file.

30 c5

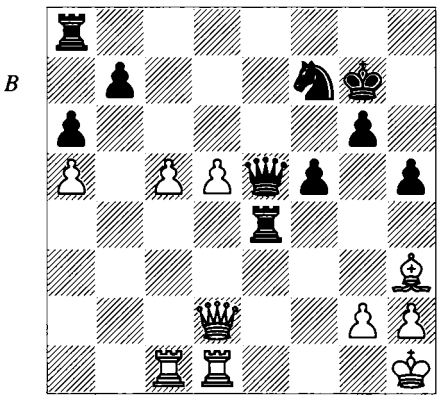
30 ♗xf5!? gxf5 31 ♖xf5 is a drastic solution to the problem of the bishop, and this sacrifice leads to equality after 31...♕e7 32 ♖cf1 ♘h6 33 ♖g5+ ♔h7 34 ♖xh5 ♖e3 35 h3. However, there is nothing wrong with the move played.

30...dxc5 31 bxc5 ♕e5

The most important feature of the position is the out-of-play bishop because while it is entombed on h3 White is effectively a piece down.

32 ♖fd1?!

White spends a tempo preventing ...♖d4, but this move is not energetic enough. 32 g3! is correct, dealing with the main problem. Then 32...h4 (after 32...♖d4 33 ♕c2 ♖xd5 34 ♗g2 ♖d7 35 ♖fe1 ♕f6 36 ♖b1 White has sufficient play for the pawn) 33 gxh4 ♖h8 34 ♕c3 ♖hxh4 35 c6 ♖e2 36 ♕xe5+ ♘xe5 37 ♗g2 ♖g4 38 ♗h3 ♖h4 leads to a draw.



32...♖e8?!

Black should seal in the bishop by 32...h4!, with a clear advantage.

33 d6?

White again misses the key point. 33 g3! is still best, when 33...♖e2 34 ♕c3 ♕xc3 35 ♖xc3 ♘g5 36 ♗f1 ♘e4 is roughly equal.

33...♖e2 34 ♕b4

White must control e1 as 34 ♕d3 loses to 34...♖e1+ 35 ♖xe1 ♕xe1+ 36 ♕f1 ♕xf1+ 37 ♖xf1 ♖c8 38 ♖c1 ♘xd6 with a won ending.

34...♘g5

Now the h3-bishop is not only fixed in place; it is the main target of Black's attack.

35 d7 ♖d8 36 ♕h4

After 36 ♕c3 ♕xc3 37 ♖xc3 ♘e4 Black wins material.

36...♔h6

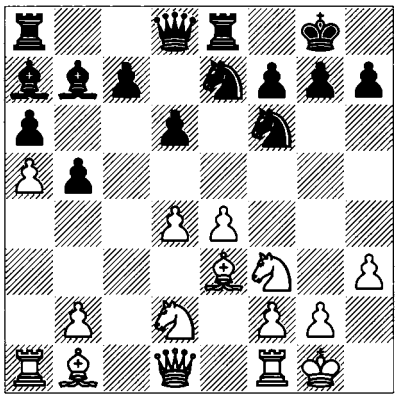
36...♘e4 37 ♕xd8 ♘f2+ 38 ♔g1 ♘xh3+ 39 ♔h1 ♘f2+ 40 ♔g1 ♘xd1 was a more forceful win, but the move played is also adequate.

37 ♕g3

Or 37 ♖b1 ♖e4 38 ♕g3 ♕xc5 39 ♖xb7 ♖d4 and Black wins the d7-pawn, after which he is a pawn ahead with a far superior position.

37...♕e4 38 ♕c3 ♘xh3 39 ♕xh3 ♖xd7 40 ♕g3 ♖xd1+ 0-1

100 Giving Up



Ganguly – Shirov
Spanish Team Ch 2009

17 e5 ♘fd5? 18 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 19 ♘g5+ ♔g8

19...♔g6 20 ♘df3 ♘xe3 21 fxe3 ♗xf3 22 ♘xf3 is also unattractive for Black; for example, 22...♔h6 23 ♘h2 dxe5 24 ♘g4+ ♔h7 25 ♖xf7 ♔g8 26 ♕f3 ♗xd4 (26...♘g6? 27 ♕f5! wins) 27 ♖f1! e4 28 ♕xe4 ♕d5 29 ♕xd5 ♘xd5 30 exd4 and White is a pawn up in the ending.

20 ♕h5 ♘g6 21 e6! ♖xe6 22 ♕h7+ ♔f8 23 ♘xe6+ fxe6 24 ♕xg6

White has won the exchange and it would be easy for Black to give up, play some desultory moves and then resign. However, Shirov fights on with spectacular results. The most notable feature is how he plays on almost as if nothing has happened, just trying to make the most of the positive features of his position (two bishops, solid knight on d5, inactive white bishop).

24...♕f6!

Exchanging queens isn't normally recommended when material down, but White's queen is so active it must be displaced.

25 ♕g3

It's not surprising that White decides to keep queens on, since 25 ♕xf6+ gxf6 improves Black's pawn-structure and opens up an avenue of attack against g2 by ...♔f7 and ...♖g8.

25...♔g8 26 ♘f3 ♖f8 27 ♖ac1 ♕f5 28 ♖fe1 ♖f7 29 ♘h4

This doesn't improve White's position, but it's not actually wrong. 29 ♕g5! ♕f6 30 ♕g4 is better, activating the queen and pressing against the weak e6-pawn.

29...♕h5 30 ♘f3 e5!?

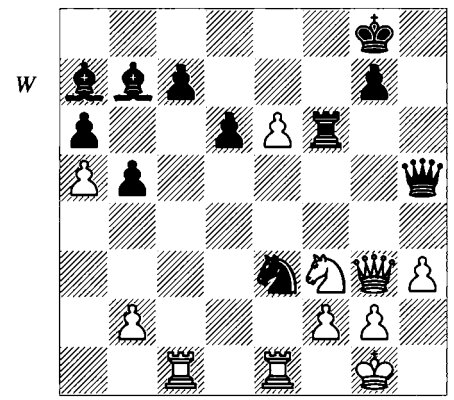
Shirov takes a gamble. He could have returned to f5, but then White might have found the right continuation. Instead, he unexpectedly opens lines. Objectively, it isn't a good move, but now White has to solve concrete problems.

31 dxe5?

31 ♘g5! is correct, since after 31...♘xe3 (31...exd4 32 ♗xd4! ♗xd4 33 ♖e8+ ♖f8 34 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 35 ♘e6+ wins for White) 32 ♘xf7 ♘f5 33 ♕b3 ♘xd4 34 ♘h6++ ♔h7 35 ♕g8+ ♔xh6 36 ♖xc7 Black's position collapses.

31...♘xe3 32 e6 ♖f6!?

Shirov is in his element. 32...♖e7 is objectively better, although White retains an advantage after 33 fxe3 ♖xe6 34 ♘g5 ♖e7 35 ♕f4.



33 e7 ♕e8 34 fxe3?

Missing the tricky winning line 34 ♖xc7! ♘xg2 35 ♔xg2 ♗xf3+ 36 ♔f1 ♗xf2 37 ♔xf2 ♗h5+ 38 ♔e3, when Black cannot exploit the exposed white king.

34...♗xf3 35 ♖xc7 ♗b8!

An easy move to miss. The rook must retreat, and then Black secures a winning position.

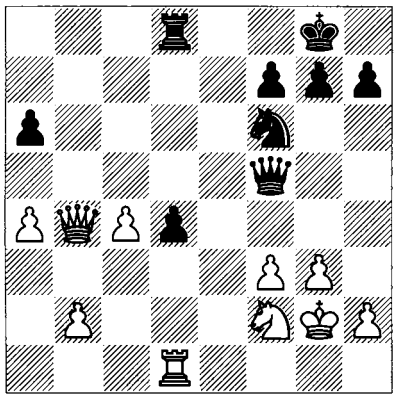
36 ♖c2 ♗e4 37 ♖f2 ♖xf2 38 ♕xf2 ♕xe7 39 ♕f4 ♗a7 40 ♔h1 ♗c5 41 ♕g4 d5 42 ♕h5 ♕f7

42...♕f6! 43 ♕e8+ ♗f8 wins at once.

43 ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 44 ♔g1 ♔e6 45 ♔f2 d4 46 exd4 ♗xd4+ 47 ♔g3 ♔d5 48 ♖e2 ♗d3 49 ♖d2 ♔e4 50 b3 b4 51 ♔h4 g5+ 52 ♔h5 ♔e3 53 ♖a2 ♗b1 54 ♖a4 ♗c3 0-1

In the previous example, Black's position at least had some merits which he could use to make life difficult for White. The situation is a little different when you are hopelessly lost and without any obvious sources of counterplay. In this case, saving the game inevitably depends on a mistake (or several mistakes!) by the opponent. However, simply sitting back and hoping for fortune to smile rarely works. Instead, make it hard for the opponent to realize his advantage by putting as many obstacles in his path as possible. Try to avoid staking everything on one swindle, unless it is an especially good one. Most successful rearguard actions depend on a war of attrition, gradually chipping away at the opponent's advantage.

B



Short – Nunn
Brussels 1986

Black is a pawn down, his own passed pawn is blocked and White has a 3 to 1 queenside majority which he can easily advance. Worst of all, there's no real sign of counterplay. First Black must deal with the threat of ♖xd4.

29...♕d7 30 ♕b6 h5

A random stab at the enemy king position is often a good idea. Even if objectively it doesn't achieve much, it can cause nervousness. Note that there's no point trying to save the a6-pawn since it's counterplay that matters, not pawns.

31 ♕xa6?

The first ray of hope for Black. White should have played 31 h4 before taking the pawn.

31...♖b8

Black's rook becomes active, while White's queen is temporarily out of play.

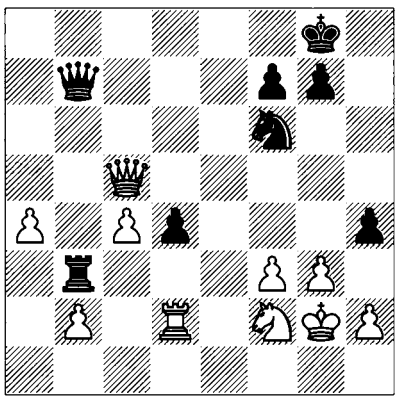
32 ♖d2 h4 33 ♕a5

The queen cannot return to the centre directly from a6, so White improves its position while at the same time threatening b4.

33...♖b3 34 ♕c5 ♕b7

34...h3+ 35 ♘xh3 ♖xf3 is an attempt at a swindle, since 36 ♔xf3? ♕g4+ 37 ♔g2 ♕e4+ 38 ♔f1 ♕b1+ is only a draw, but if White spots 36 ♖xd4! ♕b7 37 ♖d8+ ♔h7 38 ♘g5+ then the game is over.

W



35 ♖d3?

A serious error allowing Black excellent drawing chances. 35 ♘d3? falls into another trap, as 35...♘e4! 36 fxe4 ♕xe4+ 37 ♔h3 ♕e6+ leads to a draw. 35 ♕f5! is correct, because after 35...♖xb2 36 ♖xd4 ♕b6 37 c5 ♖xf2+ 38 ♔xf2 ♕b2+ 39 ♔e3 ♕c3+ 40 ♕d3 ♕e1+ 41 ♕e2 ♕c3+ 42 ♖d3 ♕xc5+ 43 ♔d2 ♕b4+ 44 ♔c1 the checks run out. However, note that even here White still has to work for the win after 44...♕xa4 45 ♖d8+ ♔h7 46 ♕c2+ ♕xc2+ 47 ♔xc2 hxg3 48 hxg3 ♘h5 49 g4 ♘f4, followed by ...g5, ...f6 and ...♔g6, with at least a temporary blockade.

35...h3+! 36 ♔xh3?

This even loses. 36 ♔g1! is correct, but after 36...♖xb2 37 ♕xd4 ♖b1+ 38 ♘d1 ♕b4 39 ♔f2 ♖c1 Black has enough counterplay to draw.

36...♖xd3 37 ♘xd3 ♕xf3 38 ♕xd4

38 ♘f4 also loses: 38...♘e4 39 ♕c8+ ♔h7 40 a5 (40 ♕f5+ ♔h6 is winning for Black) 40...d3! 41 ♘xd3 f5 with a quick mate.

38...♕f1+ 39 ♔h4 ♕f5 0-1

40 g4 g5+ 41 ♔g3 ♘e4+ 42 ♔g2 ♕xg4+ followed by a knight check wins the white queen.

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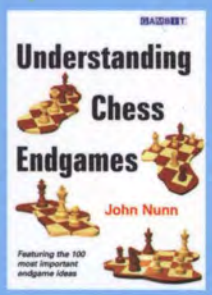

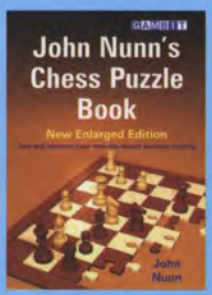

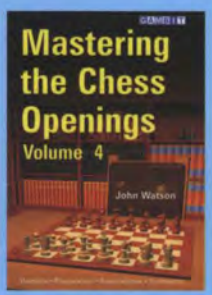

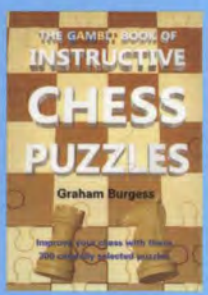

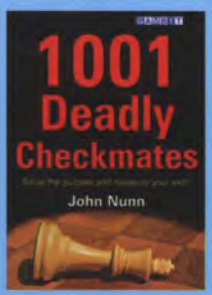

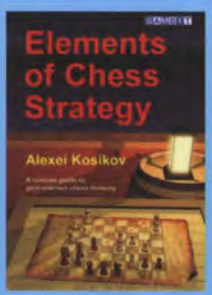

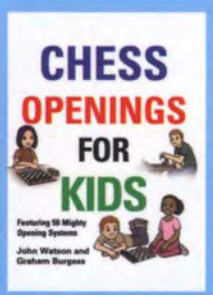

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